Neil Hamburger

interviews

Arizona Republic — July 4, 2002

Odd throwback comedian draws taunts, not laughs

By Brent Miles
brent.miles@arizonareublic.com

James Hunt Tsai

Neil Hamburger is either the least funny guy in the history of comedy or the greatest onstage social experiment since Andy Kaufman created his obnoxious alter ego Tony Clifton.

The Hamburger persona is a down-on-his-luck loser who's one step ahead of his ex-wife's lawyers but two steps behind the times, as evidenced by his out-of-date jokes. But the real fun isn't listening to his act; it's seeing how long an audience will put up with Hamburger before they start heckling him.

Arizona Republic — July 4, 2002

QUESTION: Thanks for calling promptly, normally interviewees are running late.

ANSWER: Usually you're dealing with a lot of these drug-addled musicians probably. In the comedy world, we tend to do things promptly.

Q: Do your shows start promptly?

A: I don't really have control over that, but I'm always there on time.

Q: How did you get a gig at Phoenix Greyhound Park?

A: I don't know how that happened. I think they wanted to try and bring in a younger crowd and somehow they thought I was the Pied Piper that could bring in the youth market to bet on the dogs. I think a lot of the young people today don't have a lot of disposable income and by betting on these dog races and *winning*, it's sort of a good thing for the kids because then they've got money to buy their concert tickets.

Q: We listened to your new CD, *America's Funnyman*. It's sort of funny.

A: Well, you know, the parts that aren't funny are because there was a problem with the pressing. I think they had these things manufactured overseas and there's just a lot of parts that didn't come out, you know the resin and the plastic in the manufacturing.

Q: We especially like track 42, *Suicide*.

A: I'm not familiar with that one. I am familiar with the concept of suicide, but not that track in particular.

> The Fourth of July, dog racing, apple pie and Neil Hamburger have all gone together for many years.
>
> **Neil Hamburger**

Q: Are you excited to be in Phoenix on the Fourth of July?

A: The Fourth of July, dog racing, apple pie and Neil Hamburger have all gone together for many years. Is there anything else happening in town that night that could interfere with my show?

Q: One of these newer country singers is performing here that night.

A: Jim Reeves?

Q: Good luck on the tour, we'll see you when you come to Phoenix.

A: Maybe I'll run into you before the show over at Los Arcos Mall. I need to go in there and get some socks.

If you go

Neil Hamburger

WHERE: Phoenix Greyhound Park, 3801 E. Washington St.
WHEN: 8:30 tonight.
ADMISSION: $3 at the door.
DETAILS: (602) 273-7181.

Wisconsin State Journal - Jul 26, 2012 Updated Jul 17, 2013

https://archive.is/XFV9p

by ANDY DOWNING

There's nothing hip about Neil Hamburger.

Onstage the comedian typically dresses in a dated tuxedo that wouldn't look out of place at a 1970s high school prom, and he sports an oily comb-over that stays glued to his head with nervous sweat. Between bits he loudly and repeatedly clears his throat, making a thick, phlegmy sound that suggests he's desperately in need of sinus medication.

Even Hamburger's jokes — if you want to call them that — aren't particularly witty or well-constructed. "Why does KFC come in a bucket?" goes one bit. "So you have something to throw up into afterwards."

Oh, he's also not a real person.

Hamburger, who has steadily evolved into a cult-like figure in comedy circles, is actually a character invented and portrayed by musician/comedian Gregg Turkington, designed to challenge, bait and confound audiences much the way lounge-singing Andy Kaufman creation Tony Clifton did in the late '70s.

Tim Heidecker of Adult Swim's "Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!" and "Tim and Eric's Billion Dollar Movie," who joins Hamburger for a show at the Majestic Theatre on Saturday, July 28, takes a similar approach to comedy. His jokes are often constructed as much to test audience response as they are to generate laughter, and, like Hamburger, he takes on the onstage persona of someone who probably shouldn't be doing stand-up.

"Most of the comedy we work in is generally coming from a place of 'wouldn't it be funny if?'" said Heidecker. "Sometimes it's about creating something that isn't funny at all, and that's what's funny about it. And sometimes it's just making something absurd or funny or mean."

In separate phone interviews, Hamburger (in character) and Heidecker (out of character) discussed their approaches to comedy, how it feels when someone walks out on a performance and their thoughts on the "anti-comedy" label often applied to their work

Wisconsin State Journal - Jul 26, 2012 Updated Jul 17, 2013

https://archive.is/XFV9p

by ANDY DOWNING

Neil Hamburger

I'd say half the press material I've come across refers to you in some form or another as "the comedian you'll love to hate." Are you comfortable with that reputation?

Well, it sounds like half the articles you're reading are garbage, because that's a real slap in the face. For me to take time out of my day to talk to these people, and they usually, like yourself, seem like nice people. Then the article comes out and it says things like that, which are clearly insulting and derogatory and do nothing to further my career, and, in fact, do everything to put a black cloud over whatever day I happen to come across this article. Then that leads to depression ... and I'm not going to say the pillowcase gets stained with tears, but it's not a good situation.

It's sometimes said depression leads to great comedy, so couldn't that actually be helpful?

Well, I mean, that's what some of these depressed druggies like to say to excuse what they do and say, but the root of all comedy should be a sincere desire to entertain folks for a few minutes and help them forget their horrible lives. These people pay good money ... so they can laugh and clap and really forget their troubles, and that's what every comedian should be trying to do.

What would you say to those people who have a visceral negative reaction to your style of comedy?

Well, I would say this type of comedy is not for everyone. Everyone has a particular taste. Now, some of my fans might go see Carrot Top and they might storm out of his show. But it's not going to hurt Carrot Top any because he's making millions of dollars a year. It is going to hurt me when people storm out of my show.

Wisconsin State Journal - Jul 26, 2012 Updated Jul 17, 2013

https://archive.is/XFV9p

by ANDY DOWNING

Do you get any sense of satisfaction making someone walk out of one of your shows?

Only if they're leaving the room to go to a phone and tell their friends, "Hey, hurry up! There's still 20 minutes left in the show. You've got to get here and see this guy!"

Some critics refer to your style as anti-comedy. What does that term mean to you?

I would refer to their style of criticism as anti-common sense. We're getting out there on the stage in Madison or any number of cities, and for these people to say something like that is truly appalling because I'll tell you what, the laughs are real. When people come to the show and laugh their heads off, that's real. There's nothing anti about it.

Hearing you talk about the miseries of being on tour in your act, I sometimes wonder what keeps you on the road.

Well, you know, there are certain things in life we have no choice about. For instance, foot fungus is something I think most people are afflicted with, and if we chose not to have it we wouldn't have it. Another thing is a massive heart attack that could kill you. Another one of these things is you have to pay off the attorneys, the ex-wife, and I'm not going to call them criminals, but there are folks who unfortunately I'm in a great amount of debt to, and these folks like to get their money. Seeing as I have no abilities to earn a living as a chef or a surgeon or something like that, all I can really do is get on the road and tell these jokes and watch my pay get garnished by these people.

Wisconsin State Journal - Jul 26, 2012 Updated Jul 17, 2013

https://archive.is/XFV9p

by ANDY DOWNING

Tim Heidecker

Some critics lump guys like you and Neil Hamburger under this "anti-comedy" banner. Do you have any thoughts on the term?

I don't think it's an accurate term. I think comedy is comedy. Maybe (what I do) is playing with the idea of what makes you laugh and what's funny, but I think that term is a misnomer. I don't believe in it.

Do you get more enjoyment out of making someone laugh or making someone walk out of the movie theater or comedy club or whatever?

Making someone laugh. I'm not that sadistic when it comes to my audience. There's certain value to (having someone walk out) as well. It's fun playing with the audience's expectations, and that's part of what I'm doing. But I'd rather play for people that are in on the joke than not. Although there's something fun about doing it the other way as well.

Are you performing a more traditional stand-up set on this tour?

Well, no, it's not traditional. It's really a character who shouldn't be doing stand-up, who's not very funny and is kind of a bad person. It's born out of seeing a lot of open mics and ... a lot of people who probably shouldn't be doing this.

Touring under your own name, do you worry people might not realize you're actually portraying a character?

If I was just going up at a comedy club maybe, but since we're doing these shows that we booked ourselves and are promoting ourselves, we're generally getting our audience to come out. They've seen my YouTube videos and are aware of what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to create an uncomfortable environment. It's a performance. It's an act.

Wisconsin State Journal - Jul 26, 2012 Updated Jul 17, 2013

https://archive.is/XFV9p

by ANDY DOWNING

How much of this character stems from your own onstage experience?

A lot of it comes from doing stand-up back in my younger days and failing. It's just experimenting with failure and trying to replicate the feeling of bombing. It goes in a couple directions from there, but that's the root of it.

In some ways that's also the basis for Neil Hamburger's act. How would you describe your experience seeing him perform the first time?

I ended up screaming and jumping up and down and laughing so hard it hurt. It's very rare that someone can push that out of you.

Did you find the people around you were reacting in a similar fashion?

No. I think more recently he gets an audience full of fans, but when I was seeing him back in the day it was about half and half. A lot of people didn't know him and weren't really in on the joke, so it was great to watch people's faces.

Do you generally find yourself drawn to those more polarizing forces in comedy?

Yeah, I mean, I like all kinds of different comedy, and to pull off what Gregg does, er, what Neil Hamburger does, is really challenging and not easy to do and it often doesn't work. But I like traditional comedy as well. I certainly don't hate comedy.

Interview: Neil Hamburger
Feature by Chris Purnell | 22 Aug 2011
https://www.theskinny.co.uk/festivals/edinburgh-fringe/comedy/interview-neil-hamburger

America's funnyman Neil Hamburger, has been in the biz' for over twenty years playing to sellout crowds, and opening for bands like Faith No More, Tenacious D, and NOFX. Known as the comic people love to hate, Hamburger has garnered a major record deal and a large cult following, and is now taking his act to the Fringe for a limited run at Assembly George Square.
We caught up with Neil in his hotel room, as he took a break from his tour in the US.

What can people expect at one of your shows?

Well, we do our best to try and get people laughing, so they forget their cares and their worries and just enjoy themselves, because there is so much pain and misery in people's everyday lives. It doesn't always work - I have to admit. Sometimes it just doesn't pan out. But you have to keep fighting the good fight, you know?

Have you had any shows recently when it didn't pan out?

Well, we've had a pretty good run of shows recently, but I did a show up in Calgary Canada, where a girl had a bit of a tantrum and assaulted me during the show. The police were called - it was a real mess. But then there are other shows where I am given a bouquet of flowers afterwards. You never know what you'll get.

You obviously respect the entertainment industry as a whole, but you do make rather cutting/borderline offensive jokes about actors, musicians and other celebrities. Do you see any conflict there?

I wish we lived in a world where entertainers would put out good quality products. When you see something like the ads for the Smurfs movie, all bets are off, you know? You just can't be quiet. It is our duty as part of the human race to protest these sorts of things that really could disrupt life as we know it. Something like the Smurfs movie has the possibility to lead to mass suicide among children. It is a very unpleasant way to enslave a kid for a couple of hours by making watch this shit. And I'm trying to help, you know? It's a crusade.

Interview: Neil Hamburger
Feature by Chris Purnell | 22 Aug 2011
https://www.theskinny.co.uk/festivals/edinburgh-fringe/comedy/interview-neil-hamburger

You have quite an old fashioned look – glasses, comb-over, tuxedo. Have you thought about updating a little to perhaps bring in a younger crowd?

Of course I would like to get a younger crowd, but we get people with all kinds of diseases, disabilities and problems – we'll take them all. We want everyone. I think the people that only want a young crowd are the crass acts, the garbage acts, the Britney Spears, that type of thing - where they come out in a dirty g-string to try and get 10 year olds interested.

What advice would you give someone trying to be a comic?

Don't do it. There's too many of them already. You'll be cutting into our business. Do something else. Learn to drive a bus. Bus drivers are always surly - we need some friendly ones. Wouldn't that be nice?

Do you have a message for the people of Edinburgh?

There are only so many shows you can go to, and we really do think we have a special one. I have taken the trouble to get dressed up, but you don't need to. Come in work clothes. I once had a guy come to my show in a delivery man's outfit, straight from work. And no the jokes aren't for everyone, some of them are rather risqué, but if you like that sort of thing, I believe we have the best of it that is on offer anywhere in the world, and we do think you'll enjoy it.

Neil Hamburger: Discounted Entertainer, 15-28 August at Assembly George Square. Tickets £12 (£11)

Mixing it up with Hamburger

July 14, 2011

It's always a momentous occasion when America's Funnyman, Neil Hamburger, pays a visit to Waterloo's Starlight. As those who have seen his previous performances there know, his humour is not the usual brand of Yuk Yuk's fare. But those who get it recognize that he is skewering the heart of North American pop culture. With that in mind, I aim to break a few rules myself by offering my recent conversation with Hamburger verbatim.

https://archive.is/FG9hB

Neil Hamburger's new CD is an answer to all 'mostly awful' music out there.
Chris McKay/WireImage / WireImage

It's always a momentous occasion when America's Funnyman, Neil Hamburger, pays a visit to Waterloo's Starlight. As those who have seen his previous performances there know, his humour is not the usual brand of Yuk Yuk's fare. But those who get it recognize that he is skewering the heart of North American pop culture. With that in mind, I aim to break a few rules myself by offering my recent conversation with Hamburger verbatim.

JS: Neil, you're back again touring across Canada. What are some of your favourite things about this country?
NH: Tom Green, The Poppy Family, Leonard Cohen, William Shatner, SCTV, Daiquiri, Canned Hamm, The Starlight Lounge, The Hopper Hut, and especially the Robert Tennison Troupe.
JS: Your jokes often poke fun at celebrities. Are there any Canadian celebrities that particularly get under your skin?
NH: Only the ones that have disappointed us all by dying too young.

JS: There has been an upsurge of rioting in Canada, most recently in Vancouver following the NHL playoffs. Do you think that Canada is losing its reputation as a friendly place?

Mixing it up with Hamburger

July 14, 2011

It's always a momentous occasion when America's Funnyman, Neil Hamburger, pays a visit to Waterloo's Starlight. As those who have seen his previous performances there know, his humour is not the usual brand of Yuk Yuk's fare. But those who get it recognize that he is skewering the heart of North American pop culture. With that in mind, I aim to break a few rules myself by offering my recent conversation with Hamburger verbatim.

https://archive.is/FG9hB

NH: I was starting to think so, when I got physically attacked by a disgruntled patron during a show in Calgary last month. But then the wonderful Calgary police showed up to save the day and were absolute charmers. Reputation restored!

JS: I really enjoyed your last album of country songs. Can we expect more in the near future?

NH: We are hopeful for a second album of Bakersfield-style country songs; in the meantime perhaps you'd enjoy my recent Western Music and Variety DVD. I would also like to make a disco album one day. Ethel Merman did!

JS: You're also performing at some big music festivals this summer. Are there any new bands that you are currently enjoying?

NH: No. They're mostly awful. All thumbs.

JS: What is it about doing stand-up that you enjoy as opposed to perhaps doing your own television show? I'm sure your fans would enjoy seeing you more regularly.

NH: Nothing. I would rather do the television show. Do you have any leads on making that happen?

JS: How has the response been to your Shaky Advice iPhone app?

NH: We have sold several of them, and a lot of people have made decisions using my advice that have CHANGED THEIR LIVES FOREVER.

JS: As you may know, Waterloo is home to the company that makes Blackberry devices. Their popularity has dropped a lot recently, so what advice would you give to RIM?

NH: I would suggest that they hire me to curse and swear at their top executives for all the mistakes they've made.

JS: Who is Nick Flanagan and why is he opening for you?

NH: Nick is a very, very funny up-and-comer from Toronto who I have seen many times and who is truly deserving of Fame.

JS: Lastly Neil, as someone whose job is to make other people laugh, what makes you laugh?

NH; I don't have the luxury of laughter; I am too busy devoting my time to making others laugh.

Neil Hamburger a champion of tastelessness

2011

https://pittnews.com/article/16572/archives/neil-hamburger-a-champion-of-tastelessness/amp/

Comedian Neil Hamburger thinks most of today's stand-up acts suck.

"They come out dressed like slobs with mustard or ketchup down their trousers, and you get a half-an-hour monologue about a guy sitting on a toilet seat," an in -character Hamburger said. "And generally a half an hour into this monologue, you get the weakest joke you've ever heard in your life."

The stand-up artist with a cult following plans to buck the aforementioned norm this spring alongside his current partners in comedic crime, Todd Barry and Brendon Walsh. When the three perform at The Smiling Moose on Saturday, each performer will bring his own brand of humor to create a decidedly unconventional performance.

"They're real showmen," Hamburger said of Barry and Walsh. "They take the time to put on a nice shirt, nice shoes ... that kind of thing, and actually tell some jokes and keep it entertaining and put on a professional show."

Hamburger's comedic contrarianism, however, has often incited polarized reactions to his work — or, at the very least, perplexity.

In Pittsburgh last November, for instance, Hamburger opened for Tim and Eric's "Awesome Tour, Great Job!" performance with purposefully ill-timed and poor-taste jokes about Michael Jackson, Metallica members' haircuts and the general disrespect he thought the audience was showing him. Most people understood the humor, but a few remained confused.

This was, of course, hardly an isolated incident.

"I think the best show of his I saw was at a festival in Dublin," Barry said — he and Hamburger have crossed paths a number of times over the years. "Half the people in the audience hated him and half the people loved him, so it was a spectacle on and off stage."

In addition to his stand-up work, eight comedy albums and television appearances

Neil Hamburger a champion of tastelessness

2011

https://pittnews.com/article/16572/archives/neil-hamburger-a-champion-of-tastelessness/amp/

with Tim and Eric and comedian Tom Green, Hamburger recently sang as a guest vocaliston a 7-inch single, “American Exports,” by Australian punk group the Hard -Ons.

“I get asked by these lowlifes, these degenerates to do records for them,” Hamburger said. “And I turn them down. In the case of the Hard-Ons, they’re very nice guys and I like what they’re trying to do.”

All the comedians in Hamburger’s circle boast a diverse set of interests. Todd Barry, for instance, has a passion for acting, which eventually landed him a part as Mickey Rourke’s 9-to-5 manager, Wayne, in the acclaimed 2008 drama “The Wrestler.”

“I dabbled in it during college,” Barry said of acting. “I guess it’s just nice to mix things up.”

Make no mistake, however: For Barry, acting is no substitute for comedy.

“I like doing stand-up,” he said. “I consider myself a comedian above everything else, but it’s good to have other projects to break it up.”

When he isn’t involved in movies or television shows like Adult Swim’s “Delocated” and FX’s “Louie,” Barry dishes out jokes that leave listeners wondering if he’s commending or condemning the subjects.
“There is a downside to every city,” he quipped on the “Late Show with David Letterman” in 2009. “And the thing about New York is that you will get arrested for criminal activity.”

Accompanying Hamburger and Barry on the tour is Brendon Walsh, an up-and -coming comedian who’s as much their fan as he is their colleague.

“Neil and Todd are psychos,” said Brendon Walsh. “I’m just some guy trying to make his way … I am a fan of both of those guys, at risk of sounding insincere.”

Neil Hamburger a champion of tastelessness

2011

https://pittnews.com/article/16572/archives/neil-hamburger-a-champion-of-tastelessness/amp/

Walsh's recent projects include work on a six-part series on HBO Canada called "Funny as Hell," "John Oliver's New York Stand-Up Show" on Comedy Central and an appearance on "Conan."

"I thought I saw a couple of teenage girls checking me out," Walsh said in his stand-up performance on "Conan" last November. "But when I passed them, I heard one of them telling her friend, 'There goes your boyfriend Sheila, hahaha!' ... I'm not Sheila's boyfriend!"

"I've been a fan of Conan since he started," Walsh said. "I was the third comedian on the show, and it's definitely a feather in my cap."

You might expect the comedically forward-thinking Walsh and Barry to be social media-savvy, but you can also find the decidedly old-fashioned Hamburger taking jabs at the likes of Axe body spray and Taco Bell via Twitter.

"It's certainly better than jogging," Hamburger said of Twitter. "I don't know if you've tried jogging, but that's very, very unpleasant."

HOT AIR: THE RISE OF NEIL HAMBURGER

October 10th, 2013

https://hpr1.com/index.php/arts-entertainment/arts/hot-air-the-rise-of-neil-hamburger/

Anyone hungry for a greasy new hamburger?

Los Angeles comedian Neil Hamburger might be able to feed your greasy fix with his slick comb over, oversized glasses, spiffy tuxedo, whooping cough and potty mouth this Saturday, Oct. 12 at The Aquarium.

We interviewed the comedian to talk about his experiences in Fargo-Moorhead, his severe distaste for Steven Tyler and his website dilemmas.

He did not miss a single beat.

HOT AIR: THE RISE OF NEIL HAMBURGER

October 10th, 2013

https://hpr1.com/index.php/arts-entertainment/arts/hot-air-the-rise-of-neil-hamburger/

High Plains Reader: Hey, Neil. How are you doing today?.

Neil Hamburger: Good, good. How are you?

HPR: Good. I'm just pleased to be interviewing you today.

NH: Oh good. We have a lot of great answers in store for you today, I hope.

HPR: So where are you talking to me from currently?

NH: I'm actually in Palm Springs. We did a benefit here last night for this guy whose kidney has failed. He needs a new kidney. So we came to here to Palm Springs to try to help out the guy.

It could be any of us – and of course doing a benefit like this in a bar means that everyone at the bar will have kidney failure themselves pretty soon cause there was quite a bit of, shall we say, mixed drinks that were available there. But anyway, that's where we are.

HPR: So you've been to Fargo before. Do you know how many times it's been?

NH: I'd say certainly half a dozen. Certainly more than Carrot Top has ever, you know. I don't think he takes the time to get out there, but I certainly have.

And of course in addition to several shows in Fargo, I've also done a couple in Moorhead. So I've certainly made the effort to go out and entertain the folks and I've always had a great time doing it.

HPR: Can you think of any funny insights that you remember about your visits to Fargo-Moorhead?

NH: Well, I remember this much. I made a mistake once and ordered a huge meal. It was at an Indian restaurant there that's very good. We've gone there many times. And some years ago I placed an order to pick up some food, but I was actually down in Sioux Falls and there was an Indian restaurant there that I like as well, and I called to place the order for pick up and it turned out that we misdialed and I actually dialed the number of the one in Fargo.

HOT AIR: THE RISE OF NEIL HAMBURGER

October 10th, 2013

https://hpr1.com/index.php/arts-entertainment/arts/hot-air-the-rise-of-neil-hamburger/

And of course they had the meal prepared for us hundreds of miles away and we were never able to get there and get that meal and I feel horrible about it.

But that's just one of the mistakes that happens when you're out on the road and out of your mind, usually and drinking some of the garbage liquor that some of these places serve. I'd say it's one step up from rubbing alcohol.

But you know we've always had a great time. Now I always thought that it would be nice to do a show on that bridge there right on the border of Minnesota and North Dakota and I could do the set up of the joke in one state and the punch line in other state. You know what I mean? I don't know if that's ever been done. ...

I guess you'd have to battle as to which state gets the punch line and which state gets the set up. But that's something that the governors can work out amongst themselves, or maybe some of your state senators.

HPR: Well, North Dakota usually seems to be the butt end of jokes around here.

NH: Well, I wouldn't be making jokes about the places themselves. That's in poor taste. You get these garbage entertainers, some of these crap people, somebody like a Steven Tyler of Aerosmith will come to a town and the first thing that comes out of his mouth is "Goddammit I hate this sh***y town. F*** all of you." And then he plays music and people are supposed to have a good time after that?

I would never dream of doing something like that. When you come to a town, you need to do what you can to learn about this town. ...

Somebody like Steven Tyler, he's like a rat crawling out of a sewer and sh*** all over these local towns and sprays his tainted seed into some of the local women so they end up with diseases and this is what he thinks entertainment is. And I'm sorry but it just isn't.

HPR: You don't have an official website or Facebook page. How come?

HOT AIR: THE RISE OF NEIL HAMBURGER

October 10th, 2013

https://hpr1.com/index.php/arts-entertainment/arts/hot-air-the-rise-of-neil-hamburger/

NH: Well, because I'm on the road doing these shows I don't have the time to put together one of these goddamn websites.

Now we've got some lunatic in Mesa, Arizona named Boni Jergen. She's a fan you know and she's got these two dogs though and that's the problem is that website she does for me – free-of-charge and I do appreciate that she makes the effort – but half the website is about her dogs. And the dogs are in very poor health and I've met these dogs and they are not nice dogs. You know, they jump on you and knock you down and it sticks its tongue and your mouth …
People go to my website to get information about my tours and she's got photos of the dogs and information about the dogs and she puts ads on the website looking for free food for the dogs. I guess she had a deal with the local Olive Garden. She knew a dishwasher there or something and he was giving her big bags of spoiled pasta for the dogs and that all ends up on the website.

So people complain to me. They say, "Neil, I just wanted to know when your new album comes out and I had to read about these dogs."

Well I say this, I don't have the time to do the website and this lady does.

Now I do go on Twitter, because that's easy … and then Facebook, I mean that's run by – you know, that's a cult. And then you get on there and the next thing you know they are watching you go to the bathroom. They plant a virus on your telephone that activates your camera on your phone. So if you have the phone in the bathroom, Facebook people are watching you go to the bathroom. So I don't think that anybody should go to that website.

HPR: You've been labeled as an anti-comedian. Would you agree with that label?

NH: Well let me ask you this, if you have a plumbing disaster in your kitchen and the garbage disposal breaks down and the sink is backed up and there's shredded food that's overflowing onto the floor and some plumber shows up and repairs it all, are you able to call him an anti-plumber? No.

HOT AIR: THE RISE OF NEIL HAMBURGER

October 10th, 2013

https://hpr1.com/index.php/arts-entertainment/arts/hot-air-the-rise-of-neil-hamburger/

And this is the thing. I go into these towns where laugh is needed. And I tell the jokes and people laugh and have a great time. I don't see why they call this anti -comedy. To me, anti comedy would be going to see a heavy metal band or going to see Luciano Pavarotti, the opera singer not alive anymore. That's not a comedy show, is it?

An anti-comedy show would be going out for pizza, Chuck E. Cheese. Why? Because there's not a comedian. No jokes. Or an anti-comedy show is getting your car washed. There's not a comedian. No jokes.

I come into town and I get on stage in a tuxedo and tell jokes one after another and hopefully people laugh. There is nothing anti about it. It's strictly legitimate. And that's how we like to look at it.

And some of these weirdo journalists will say anything to sell a paper and I think that's what's going on there.

HPR: But some of the funniest parts of your comedy are when people heckle you or boo or hiss and then you come back at them. Do you go into shows hoping some people will act this way?

NH: No, no. This is nothing we ever plan for. Sometimes on the spur of the moment something will happen that is extremely unpleasant and sometimes we turn it into something entertaining for the audience.

If some sick weirdo drunkard druggie says some horrible things to me, I will respond. And sometimes that becomes very entertaining but it's certainly nothing that you'd go out of your way to encourage.

You know, it can be very demoralizing when you are trying to put together a show and entertain folks and you've got some smart ass who is just bellowing stupidity.

HOT AIR: THE RISE OF NEIL HAMBURGER

October 10th, 2013

https://hpr1.com/index.php/arts-entertainment/arts/hot-air-the-rise-of-neil-hamburger/

And a lot of times what the hecklers are doing is hollering out what they think the punch line might be and it's just not funny cause these are not professional comedians – they aren't even professional human beings. A lot of these people can't tie their own shoes or feed themselves properly. So to expect that they would say something funny, you know it's a long shot.

And so that's the problem. I do think that if you had a smart heckler who had something funny to say, I'd be glad to turn the show over to him and he can entertain the people but we just never get those types of hecklers. We just get – I would have to call them losers, people that make the whole room an unpleasant place to be for everybody.

HPR: I read an older interview where you said you read USA Today to stay current with your jokes. Is that still true?

NH: We do look at that cause it will tell you what's going on. A lot of times it's out of my price range and we'll find out when the recycling program is going on in the local community and we'll go out in the morning and look for a whole weeks worth of newspapers out in the blue bins out in the streets.

HPR: Do people give you a hard time for being a vegetarian when your last name is Hamburger?

NH: Well the fact is a lot of the hamburger out there is tainted. It's spoiled food. And I don't think anybody wants to eat spoiled food. When you are traveling and doing a show every night, you can't afford to get food poisoning for a week. Then you have to cancel shows and I can't afford to cancel shows.

So I would stick with eating sterilized types of food. That canned fruit cocktail is very good. I travel with a case of that in the trunk of my car and some plastic forks and that has all the nutrients that you would need. Canned peas, you can get at an electric frying pan at a thrift store and get some oil and you sauté the canned peas and put some mint jelly in there with the peas and you've got a very nice meal.

HOT AIR: THE RISE OF NEIL HAMBURGER

October 10th, 2013

https://hpr1.com/index.php/arts-entertainment/arts/hot-air-the-rise-of-neil-hamburger/

And that's the type of thing that prevents sickness.

You know, you go eat at Taco Bell or KFC and you're sicker than anybody and puking and that type of thing, and I just don't have time for that.

HPR: Yes, you tour a ton. How many shows do you do a year?

NH: Well, we do – how many days are there in a year?

HPR: 365.

NH: We do 366. I mean we do not screw around. You see, we keep doing these shows because honestly that's what people need is laughs. And there is so much misery turning up day after day. Without us out there doing this you might have people falling into despondency. And you don't want that.

HPR: Well thank so much, Neil Hamburger. You were wonderful to interview. Is there anything you'd like to add or say to your Fargo fans?

NH: Just please come to the show. It would be really depressing if you didn't. I mean, what else is going on in town that night? Probably some dirty degenerate rock pigs playing at some crappy horrible venue. Or else maybe sitting around eating buffalo chicken wings at some sports dump. Or staying home? And sweeping? And vacuuming? That's not good either.

So I think given those options, this is the best option. The show isn't for everyone but I do feel if you are in need of a laugh you'll enjoy what we have to bring to the region, especially when I'm bringing along Major Entertainer Mike H who is another top-flight entertainer.

Toronto Star 06/06/2010

COMEDY INTERVIEW

What leaves a bad taste in Hamburger's mouth

Comb-over king of alt-comedy back for more border woes

BRUCE DEMARA
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

It's been almost three years since our last conversation, I remind comic Neil Hamburger over the phone, days before his return to Toronto for a two-night engagement at the Comedy Bar.

"It seems that we're both doing the same thing. Where did we go wrong?" Hamburger observes mordantly.

The funnyman with the rumpled sartorial style, halting, throat-clearing delivery, sardonic wit and salty tongue hasn't achieved the same kind of fame of many of his onstage targets. (e.g.: "What do you call the creatures who are growing in the pile of potato chip wrappers and discarded G-strings behind Britney Spears' house? Her children.") But he has earned a cosy sinecure in the world of counterculture comedy and requires little prompting to launch into diatribe mode, displaying his trademark venom-laced verbosity with pseudo-sincerity.

Q: Has Michael Jackson's death had an impact on your act?

A: I had to drop all my Michael Jackson jokes. However, I did replace them with another dozen new Michael Jackson jokes. It does close off jokes about Michael Jackson as a living entity but it brings up new jokes of Michael Jackson as a dead entity. So you'll see that we have worked it into the show as kind of a tribute to Michael Jackson.

Q: What else can we expect to see in your show?

A: Well, you know, we can't give it all away. I can tell you what you won't see. I'm not going to come out in a dirty T-shirt and ramble for a half an hour like a lot of these so-called 'alternative' comedians with no punchlines. We've got real jokes and we've got dozens of them, if not hundreds, if not thousands and we try to get as many out as possible to maximize the laugh potential for the evening. No rambling about going to store and buying strawberries and they're out of strawberries and deciding to buy blueberries and so on like these guys do.

Q: Why so long since last visit?

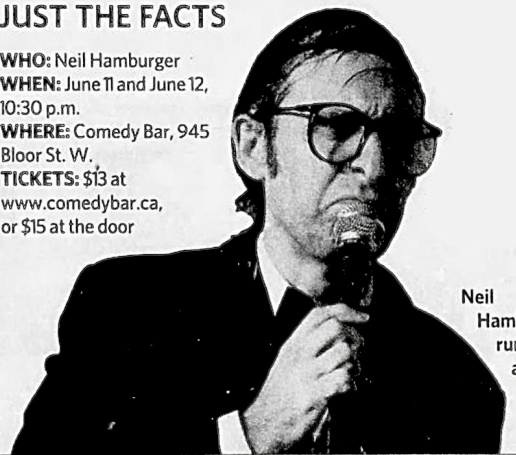
A: We've missed the last couple of years because honestly, the border crossings are so unpleasant. It really takes the wind out of your sails when you get excited to come up and do a show and these guys — and it's both sides, it's the Canadians and the Americans — they really are not very friendly to folks that are simply there to... cross the border and spread some cheer or have a vacation or whatever. If I were some deranged druggie, sure, cause a little bit of trouble. But here I am, one of the cleanest-cut comedians, I think, ever to come down the pipe and why I should have to listen to some of this s--t, I don't know. Maybe you don't want to print any of that or these guys will harass me even more.

Q: You don't like celebrities like Madonna and Paris Hilton but you still use them in your act, don't you?

A: They're both trash bags, let's face it. They're both bottom of the barrel, complete human garbage and so folks find that funny... Quite frankly, I would like to see them just disappear so I wouldn't have to make jokes about them. That's the last thing I want to be thinking about or hearing about or seeing. That's how you lose a lunch. You spend $5 on a quality lunch, chow mein or something like that, and then these people, Madonna or Brittany Spears or whoever, Paris Hilton, they come on the TV and you lose your lunch, you lose your lunch right in your damn lap and then it's off to the laundrymat.

JUST THE FACTS

WHO: Neil Hamburger
WHEN: June 11 and June 12, 10:30 p.m.
WHERE: Comedy Bar, 945 Bloor St. W.
TICKETS: $13 at www.comedybar.ca, or $15 at the door



Neil Hamburger: rumpled and rude.

INDIE MUSIC

This Hamburger isn't for all tastes

What makes comic great is his willingness to stand on stage and suffer the humiliation

JASON SCHNEIDER

CONCERT

Who:	**Neil Hamburger, with Daquiri**
Where:	**Starlight Club, Waterloo**
Day:	**Wednesday**
Time:	**9 p.m.**
Cost:	**$10**
Phone:	**885-4970**

The test of a great artist is how accurately he or she reflects their time, and that test is crucial when it comes to judging comedy. There are some who believe that Neil Hamburger is the funniest stand-up comedian in the world right now. Then again, there are just as many who think he is the worst.

One thing that is for sure, like Andy Kaufman and Lenny Bruce before him, Hamburger forces audiences to make that choice, the consequences be damned. On the surface, his act is simple: he appears on stage as a down-and-out Vegas-style lounge lizard, huge glasses briefly distracting attention from his equally exaggerated combover.

The arm that wields the microphone also cradles at least four or five cocktails which are consumed throughout the course of his set. His delivery is pure stand-up amateurism, an endless string of out-of-date one-liners, punctuated by painful coughing into the mike, and his catch-phrase that has become the mantra for a new generation of losers, "Thaaaatttt's my life!"

So what would make this sort of entertainment appealing to anyone outside of a mental institution? Well, having been clued into Hamburger about five years ago by my friend Charles at Orange Monkey Music in Waterloo (still his No. 1 fan), his act, although utterly baffling the first time, instantly reminded me what comedy should be.

Of course, we all enjoy comedy. Most of us could probably turn on the TV after a long day and just watch reruns of Seinfeld and The Simpsons all night. But there will still always be those moments when comedy transcends all expectations beyond simply getting a laugh; when the threat of seeing or hearing something completely and gloriously new momentarily stops time.

Fortunately, you can experience that if you get to see Andy Kaufman on any of his Saturday Night Live appearances that Global and Prime are rerunning on a nightly basis. Or you can experience it by going to see Hamburger. After all this build-up, it might be unfair to delve into his background, and in reality, it's pretty unimportant.

Waterloo Region Record — October 07, 2004

PUBLICITY

Neil Hamburger can be baffling as his audience is forced to decide whether he is the worst stand-up comedian or the best. You can voice your opinion on Wednesday at the Starlight.

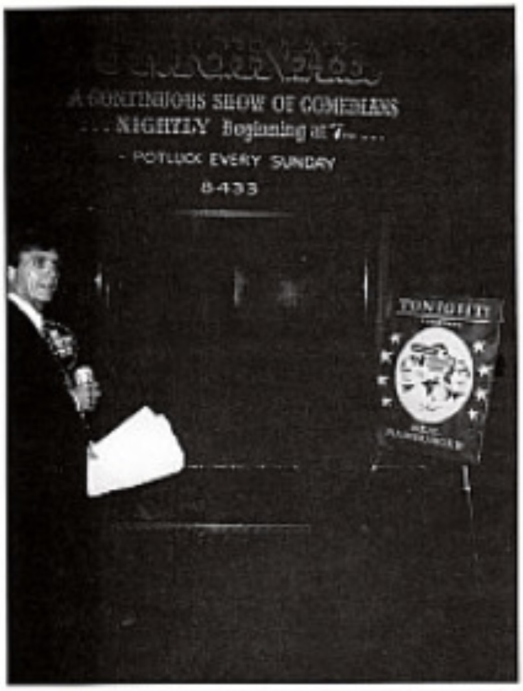
Hamburger is the creation of southern California native Gregg Turkington, also founder of tiny independent label Amarillo Records. Hamburger's first appearance came on a 1993 Amarillo album called Great Phone Calls, on which he gives a beleaguered secretary at a comedy club a barrage of his material in an attempt to get a gig. But the gigs started coming, and the Hamburger legend was spread through CDs like America's Funnyman, and Left For Dead In Malaysia.

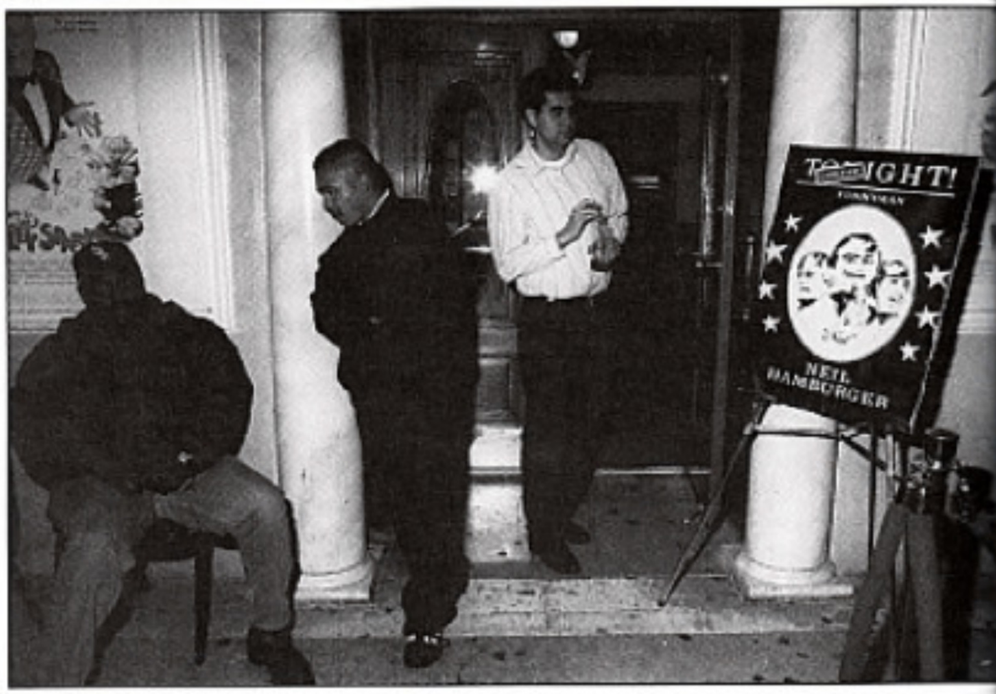
Although these are always recorded in front of audiences, it's often hard to tell since whatever reaction the jokes get (if any), is forced laughter or outright hostility. It's pointless to provide an example of Hamburger's humour, suffice to say that on the page it isn't funny. But the willingness to be subjected to a Hamburger routine is half the battle.

Because it is his willingness to stand on stage, albeit as a persona, and take whatever ridicule that is thrown at him, that truly makes him a hero for our time.

One definition of comedy has always been taking those with dignity down a few pegs, but Hamburger is arguably the first stand-up comedian to have no dignity. Is that funny? You be the judge. In a world where dignity is becoming a rare commodity, it probably is.

From Grand Royal magazine, 1997 issue 4





Grilling Hamburger

You're cruising down the highway of life, and there on the entertainment median stands the modern comedian,smashing watermelons with an over-sized gavel or playing some nasal cod-reggae in a laughable (yet rarely amusing) attention-getting effort. It's better to just speed on by, though it may seem like you'd be doing the free world a favor by mowing the poor soul down. Comedy albums just seem to document this debacle, and with the buffer of nightclub drinks to oil the funnybone gone, there's not much gratification in heckling a CD.

Which is all to say that when the Drag City debut album by comedian Neil Hamburger dropped through the Grand Royal mail chute, expectations floundered at the bottom of a cesspool of contempt. Yet the self-aggrandizing populism of the CD's title—America's Funnyman—had enough persuasive panache to merit a spin, and besides, it looked better than the new Gastr del Sol record. And lo and beggorah, within lay some of the funniest stuff since the Jerky Boys started turning tricks with Ma Bell. Here was Neil—the hapless Joe Franklin of stand-up—live, without a net, balancing himself atop the tightrope of life's tragicomic thread with not one but two catchphrases ["NnnnneeeeeiIlllLLLLLLLLL HAMMMMMMMMMMBURRRrrger" and "...but thatttttt's my LIFE!"] to help him maintain his balance, spinning a routine out of material as painful as his own divorce and as, uh, touching as waking up with an orange penis. You know, the sort of material the Diceman would give up smoking to have. And if those of you out there hoarding your Pigmeat Markham records are chortling dismissively, remember that even if Hendrix demolished the Monkees when they toured together, Head is a better movie than Rainbow Bridge. Cos life's a gas and Neil's a two-tins-o'-beans kind of guy, compulsively working the laff factory circuit (where dark-star luminary Anton LaVey has become a frequent presence in the audience) as he does.

When Drag City liaison Gene Booth mentioned recently that "Neil's gears are grinding a bit as he 'goes blue' with his new material," we knew the time was right to catch up with Mr. Hamburger. We finally interviewed him via a trail of facsimilies as he toured across Australia (Neil's big outback, if you catch our drift), recording some typically raucous shows for his new "adult" album, Raw Hamburger, even as Drag City minions negotiated with a South Korean television network to recover the stolen masters of the recently recorded Neil Hamburger Variety Hour TV special.

SO, HOW'S THE DIVORCE GOING?

Fantastic—the cost has finally surpassed the cost of our honeymoon, and neither experience was romantic in the slightest.

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND. WHO WERE THE COMICS THAT INSPIRED YOU TO "TAKE IT TO THE STAGE"?

I'm inspired by all my contemporaries in the comedic world. So much talent out there. It's just amazing. They're all such big influences on what I do, they're nearly interchangeable.

WELL, WHAT'S THE HAMBURGER TAKE ON THAT GUY THAT SMASHES WATERMELONS?

A very, very funny man. A great idea. That's the way to go, get a gimmick and then overuse it. The gimmicks are always a good idea. It makes it easy for the people to identify with. It works every time. He's no doubt very rich.

HOW 'BOUT REDD FOXX?

Very funny stuff. "Blue" humor. He passed away.

RICHARD SIMMONS?

He's been very successful, so he must be doing something right. A very talented man at weight loss and probably other entertainment-related things as well.

DAVID COPPERFIELD?

I like those other magicians better, the gay Germans with the white tiger. I saw them at the Mirage, now that was an act!

DESCRIBE THE "HAMBURGER DEMOGRAPHIC."

The unborn! Seriously, I think my humor has universal appeal. Not universal sales, but universal appeal. We all lose from time to time, and what better way to deal with it than to laff?

WHAT EXACTLY IS "ZIPPER LIPS"?

The question everyone is asking can only be answered by attending one of my many performances...you lousy zipper lips!

YOU'RE ON THE ROAD A LOT... WHAT DOES NEIL HAMBURGER PREFER? MOTELS OR HOTELS?

Motels. The beds are usually smaller, preventing me from tossing and turning as much during my frequent nightmares. Also, the walls are usually thinner, making it easier to eavesdrop on romantic interludes in the next room. (Hey, the way my luck's been lately, I'll take what I can get!)

WHAT DO YOU THING OF THOSE REST STOPS IN OREGON WHERE THEY SERVE FREE COFFEE? THAT SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD IDEA.

They oughta dispense "speed" while they're at it. I should save that for my Raw Hamburger album, actually. But getting good coffee on the road can be tough. I went into a donut shop the other day and ordered a danish and a cup of coffee. They brought out this cup with a whitish-brown fluid in it, and when I tried to drink it I soon found out it was full of little coagulated lumps the size of peas. And that was just the danish—you should've seen the coffee!

DO PEOPLE EVER CONFUSE YOU WITH "THE HAMBURGLAR"?

I got some bookings in Michigan once from a

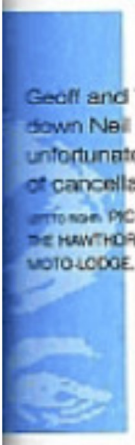
A Grand Royal Q&A With America's Funnyman, Neil Hamburger

by Peter Relic and Jay W. Babcock

photos: Tim Koh

Geoff and Tim Koh attempted to track down Neil and get some rare live photo's, unfortunately we were hampered by a rash of cancellations.

left to right: PICO-UNION COMEDY CAVALCADE (2/22/97) THE HAWTHORN CIVIC CENTRE (3/13/97) AND MR. MOTO'S MOTO-LODGE, GLASSEL PARK (4/5/97)



firm that did just that. They wanted me for a children's birthday party, and when I arrived without the "Hamburglar" garb, I was asked to leave.

WORD IS YOU'RE AN AVID MINIATURE GOLFER AND HAVE ONE MEAN GAME.

You do what you can to pass the time. Sometimes you get rained out, that's the way my luck's been lately. My favorite courses are the newer ones. Things have gotten very sophisticated.

WE'VE BEEN TRYING TO WORK UP SOME MATERIAL OF OUR OWN. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS ZINGER: "ALL I'VE GOT TO SAY TO TRANSVESTITES IS... THEY CALL THEM WOMEN'S CLOTHES FOR A REASON, PAL!"

That's funny. I might use that one. Very clever. Here's one for you: What do you call a mob of 50 angry men, each one carrying a noose and with the single-minded intention to kill?

Answer: My audience last night in Cairns!

HOW LONG'S IT BEEN SINCE YOU LAUGHED TIL YOU CRIED AND WHY DID YOU?

A heckler last night in Cairns said something really funny to me. It threw me off and ruined the gag I was working on. I'd rather not repeat it, though it was quite funny. I like Rich Little as well.

DOES HECKLING HURT?

No. Only silence does. I take a lot of painkillers.

HMMM...SO, WHAT'S UP WITH ALL THOSE SULLEN YOUTHS YOU SEE AT THE MALL?

It used to be kids had a chip on their shoulder. Now they've got a rock. Of crack cocaine! But seriously, kids will be kids. I sometimes am irritated when I have a pizza parlor "gig," because the kids will talk during my set or play video games loudly.

WHAT IS NEIL HAMBURGER'S POLITICAL PERSUASION?

I once performed at a nightclub in California for Jerry Ford's son, and ever since I've voted Ford in every election. It was an honor. Other celebrities reputed to have seen my act include Frank Sinatra, Jr.; Pablo Cruise; Euronymous from the rock group Mayhem; Cindy Birdsong of the Supremes; percussionist William Winant; and D.B. Cooper.

TELL YOUR FAVORITE ANECDOTE INVOLVING BATTER.

That would have to be Laurel and Hardy's classic "Who's on First." Very timely stuff, even today with smog and the economy in a slump.

WHAT'S ON YOUR POWERBOOK?

A price-tag that I cannot afford. Hence, these handwritten answers.

WHAT REALLY "GETS YOUR GOAT?"

Honking, ballpark nacho "cheese," stamps that don't stick, urinal etiquette, electrical surges, hums, blips, a failed career, constant depression.

WHAT'S THE LAST PRODUCT YOU ORDERED OFF THE HOME SHOPPING NETWORK?

I tried to order a moveable artificial hand, but the operator claimed it was actually a ring that was being offered.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO YOUR 15-YEAR-OLD SELF IF YOU MET ON THE STREET?

Get me Geraldo Rivera's phone number! We've got a story to tell! But seriously, youth is a precious thing.

WHAT ARE THE TABOO SUBJECTS IN COMEDY?

I don't think there should be any taboos, except maybe singing. Comedians who sing during their act should rethink their approach. It spoils the purity of the routine, and shows that they are not really committed to comedy.

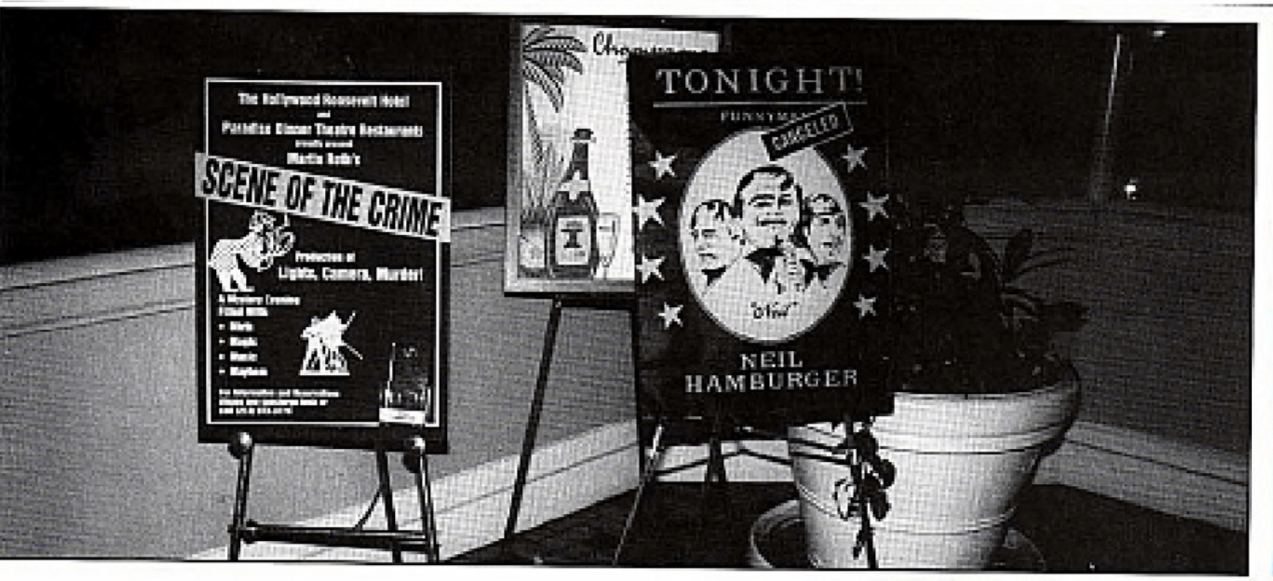
LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR CURRENT PROJECT, RAW HAMBURGER. WHERE ARE YOU GETTING THE MATERIAL FOR YOUR NEW XXX ROUTINE?

Well, some of it is very old material that I've been using for years, but with an added "twist." Since the recording is not finished yet, we are still coming up with more material, which in some cases involves researching lifestyles that I am not completely familiar with.

HOW DO YOU HIRE YOUR GHOSTWRITERS?

Everything in the routine comes straight from

From Grand Royal magazine, 1997 issue 4



For information on how to obtain a copy of Neil Hamburger's CD *America's Funnyman*, contact:
Gene Booth
c/o Drag City Records
PO Box 476867
Chicago, IL 60647-6867

my heart. In other words, I can't afford to hire ghost writers.

SO, WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON PORNOGRAPHY?

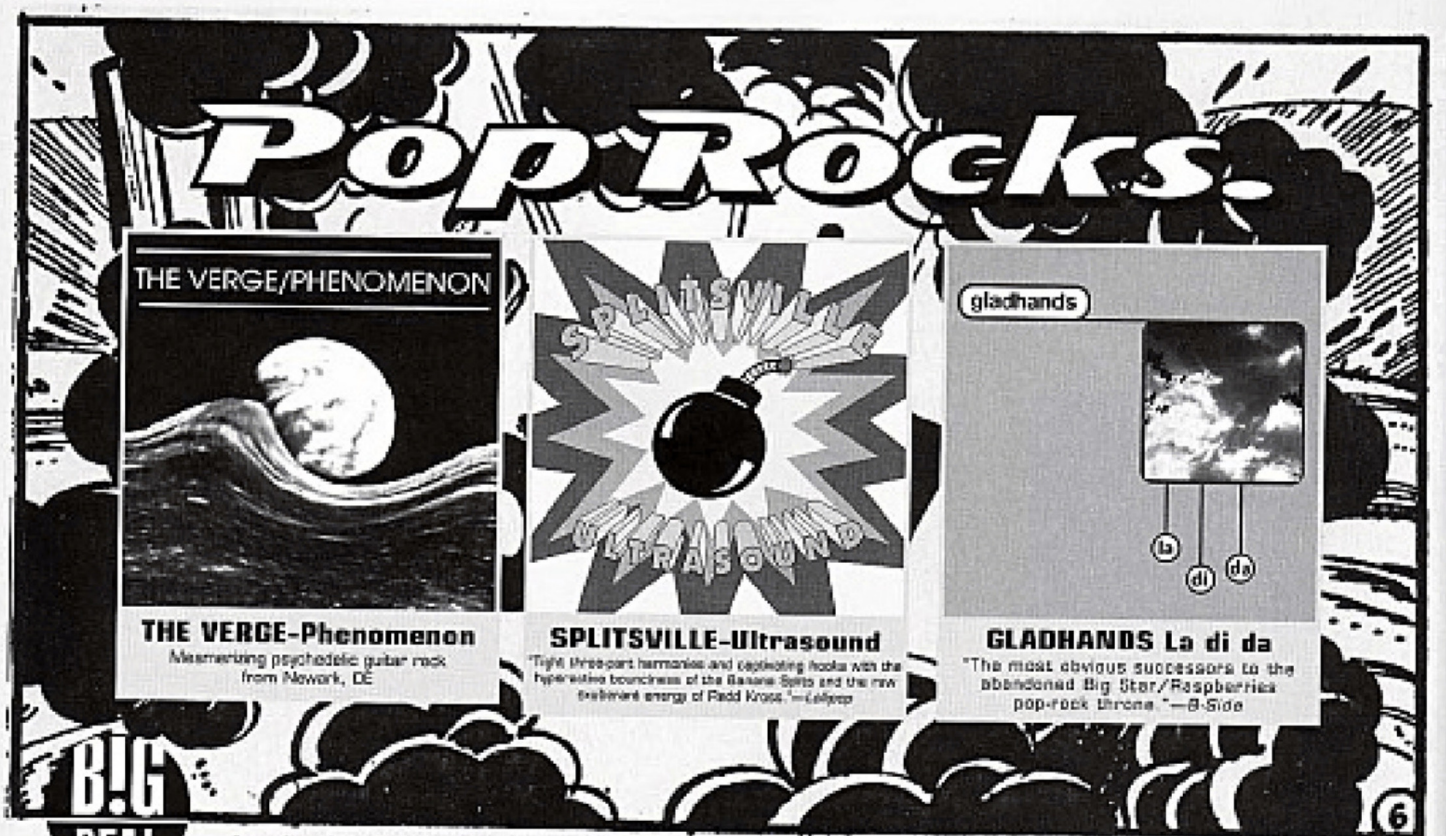
I see a lot of this sort of thing on a pay-per-view basis at certain hotel chains. I find it very educational—I've never seen such huge "garbanzos" in my life! But seriously, it is not something I can support.

IS COMEDY SPIRITUAL, THEN?

It is certainly surrounded with the aura of death.

Y'KNOW, NEIL, WE LIVE IN THE CITY OF ANGELS (THAT'S "LOS ANGELES" IN MEXICAN), WHICH IS A PRETTY BIG COMEDY MARKET. HOW COME WE'VE NEVER SEEN YOU DO A SHOW? ARE YOU PULLING SOME KIND OF "COMEDY HOAX"?

I lived in the Los Angeles area for many years, but it is hard to get bookings in Los Angeles and Hollywood. I have played many, many times in Paso Robles, Beaumont, Banning, Riverside, Lancaster, and some of the other suburbs. I had a regular booking in Palmdale at a pizza parlor there for YEARS, until it went under and was torn down and replaced with a chiropractic office. As if there aren't enough of those in Palmdale already! But to answer your questions: Because of my recent divorce, I've specifically asked my manager not to book me in Southern California for a while. That's where my ex-wife lives, and being in the area reopens painful wounds. It also makes it easier for her to serve a subpoena. As for the hoax thing, I don't quite understand your question. I've been playing hundreds of shows for years now, to hundreds of people. That's no big secret. And I've made many friends along the way. REAL people who relate to my REAL jokes! If my career is a hoax, well, then I'm its biggest victim, because there's been some real pain on the road to achieving my dreams. But hey, if you're in doubt, come out, see the show, buy the record, loosen up...and LAUGH! And please buy my new album, America's Funnyman. I'm afraid if they don't unload some copies soon, the employees at Drag City (the label who released it) will suffocate and die—there are copies stacked all the way to the ceilings and blocking the air vents and exits.



For a free CD sampler and catalogue, write to: Big Deal, Box 2072, Peter Stuyvesant Station, NY, NY 10009-9998. All Big Deal CDs are available by mail order $13 postage paid. Overseas and Canada add $2 per item. NYS residents add 8¼% sales tax. BIGDEALNYC@aol.com

NEIL HAMBURGER

Bad jokes or elaborate hoax?

Article by Dan Eldridge, photo by Lance Hammond

Resonance, February 2003

Neil Hamburger shuffles out from behind the flimsy black curtain and onto the center-stage of a small dance club, wearing a cheap rental tux and a defeated frown. This man would rather be anywhere but here.

He holds the microphone up to his mouth and lets out a long sigh of defeat before beginning. "Why didn't Santa Claus give Osama bin Laden anything for Christmas?" he asks the audience, which has already started heckling. "Because he blew up the World Trade Center!"

With hardly a chuckle and a profoundly bad sense of comic timing, Hamburger launches into joke after joke, each awkward observation and plagiarized punchline unfunnier than the one before.

The story of this tragically insecure comedian who calls himself "America's Funnyman" supposedly begins 14 years ago. A psychiatrist in a State-of-California-mandated program for troubled youth, the story goes, introduced a then 20-year-old Hamburger to the therapeutic benefits of performing at open-mic nights at a local comedy club.

"I can't say it was the best advice," Hamburger admits. His fake powder-blue carnation droops on his lapel and a few damp strands of black hair cling to his sweaty forehead. "I haven't had the best career But once I was up there I realized this is my destiny, and I've been doing it ever since."

Hamburger's "big break" came in 1996, when a scout for Chicago's Drag City Records discovered a self-released 7-inch in a thrift store. He tracked down the struggling comedian in the industrial Los Angeles

NEIL HAMBURGER
Bad jokes or elaborate hoax?
Article by Dan Eldridge, photo by Lance Hammond
Resonance, February 2003

suburb of Culver City and asked for a full-length album. The result was *America's Funnyman,* a 34-minute disaster recorded live in Albuquerque, Modesto and Las Vegas and featuring one or two funny jokes and a description of Hamburger's crumbling personal life. The sounds of pizza parlor video games and snickering audience members are audible on most of the tracks.

"I don't know the people at those other record companies, but I'm always open to doing things for anyone if they're willing to pay," Hamburger offers when asked if he secretly harbors more mainstream ambitions. "If I can get a couple more drinks a night at the shows, or an extra pizza slice or something like that, then we might have something to talk about there."

Of course, if Hamburger's outlandish piteousness seems like a bit too much to believe, there may be a good reason. Many fans (most of them in-the-know hipsters who appreciate the nod to the Andy Kaufman-created Tony Clifton) claim that Neil Hamburger is nothing more than a well-groomed hoax. Allegedly, he's a thirty-something record label owner from San Francisco who made the original albums on a cheap home recorder and only dons the tux and funny glasses for the 30 minutes that it takes him to complete a set.

Hamburger's a tricky guy to pin down. When pressed for details about his hometown, for instance, he grows elusive. "I'm essentially a homeless comedian," he says, with the expression of a trapped rabbit. "My home is the motel rooms of America and Australia and any other place that will have me. I do have a storage locker outside of Roseburg,

NEIL HAMBURGER
Bad jokes or elaborate hoax?
Article by Dan Eldridge, photo by Lance Hammond
Resonance, February 2003

https://web.archive.org/web/20090808025954/http://geocities.com/eldridge1973/hamburger.html

Oregon, and I've got another one outside of Laverne, California."

Yet another inconsistency lies lies with Hamburger's supposedly relentless touring schedule. "I'm on stage 365 nights a year, 365 years a century," he claims. "If I'm not on stage, I'm behind the wheel of a car driving to the next show."

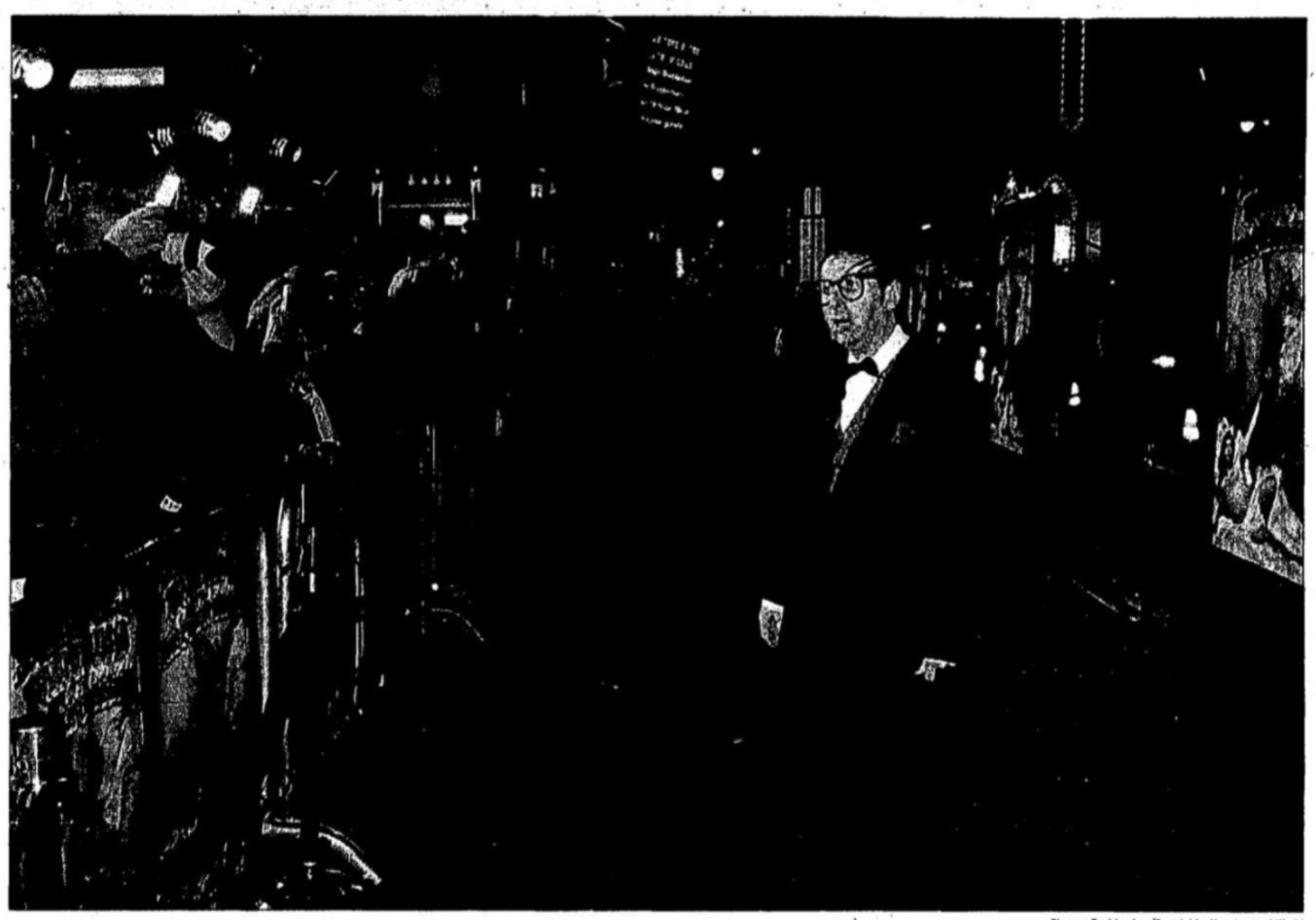
But a quick check with tour support at Drag City tells another story--specifically, that the 2002 tour consists of only four weeks of mostly West Coast shows.

However, according to Boni Jergen, a Mesa Community College student who refers to herself as the Official Webmaster of the Unofficial Neil Hamburger Web site, the reason for the discrepancy is that the "regional" pizza parlor bookings aren't advertised. 'At some of those smaller shows," she claims, "the crowd is more there for the pizzas than to see Neil."

So, what gives?

"Here's the thing," Hamburger says, leaning over this journalist's tape recorder and practically shouting into the mic. "I have no other marketable skills," he pleads, failing to make eye contact. "This is it. This is it for me."

Lawrence Journal World — Apr 25, 2007



Simone Turkington/Special to the Journal-World

NEIL HAMBURGER walks the red carpet at the premiere of the film "Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny," in which he appears.

HAMBURGER: king of comedy

Cult performer extracts humor from being not very funny

By Jon Niccum
jniccum@ljworld.com

ONLINE: For additional audio interviews with Neil Hamburger, go to www.ljworld.com

Flanked by camera flashes and microphones wielded by the Hollywood media, Neil Hamburger found himself roving the red carpet usually reserved for the entertainment industry's glitterati.

The deadpan and disheveled comedian was experiencing his first taste of the good life in a career that could be described — to paraphrase Orson Welles — as "wearying, unpleasant and unrewarding."

"I'll tell you, walking down the red carpet in front of (Grauman's) Chinese Theater sure beats sleeping in a rolled-up carpet behind some of the theaters that I perform in," Hamburger says.

Best known for his masochistic stand-up routine, Hamburger relished being invited to the film premiere of "Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny," in which he makes his big-screen debut.

"One second in a Tenacious D movie beats 100 nights performing in Elko, Nevada," he says.

Things are looking up for Hamburger ... somewhat.

The comedian has spent much of the year touring as the opening act for Tenacious D, the duo composed of movie star Jack Black and musical partner Kyle Gass. He's also just released his second DVD, "The World's Funnyman."

Originally dubbed America's Funnyman, Hamburger has apparently graduated to being the master of a global stage.

"I think you're looking at a marketing gimmick," he clarifies during a tour stop in Los Angeles. "When you've got stuff that's tough to sell — whether it's my patented brand of comedy or the new Pringles sour cream and onion potato chips — you've got to pull out all the stops. Now, I have performed internationally quite a bit in the last year — which could contribute to earning a title such as that, were it a real title."

More Willy Loman than Will Ferrell, Hamburger is the current poster boy for un-comedy. It's an ideology first popularized by the

Please see TASTE, page 2D

NEIL HAMBURGER

What: Neil Hamburger Pleaseeausaur

When: 10 p.m. today

Where: The Jackpot Music Hall, 943 Mass.

Tickets: $7 (18-and-over show)

Ticket info: 832-1085

Lawrence Journal World — Apr 25, 2007

Taste for odd humor is Hamburger's helper

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1D

late Andy Kaufman, and whose tactics also can be glimpsed in Sacha Baron Cohen's Borat and Ali G characters.

Some audiences assume Hamburger is the worst comedian they've ever heard. Others pick up on the fact he's a gifted performance artist engaged in a lingering hoax.

How funny can being awkward, outdated, whiny and pitiful be? In Hamburger's case, pretty funny.

Keeping it fresh

"The most difficult part of marketing Neil is dealing with people who don't understand his humor. More specifically, that he is funny because he's not funny," says Nicole Crowley, publicist for Drag City Records.

"The jokes are horrible, kinda like your creepy uncle's jokes, and you laugh because they are so bad."

Drag City is responsible for releasing seven of Hamburger's CDs, including "Raw Hamburger," "Laugh Out Lord" and "Left for Dead in Malaysia," an excruciating live show supposedly recorded in Kuala Lumpur in which there is literally NO laughter emanating from the audience.

Because the hipster indie label mainly deals with hipster indie rock acts (Royal Trux, Bonnie Prince Billy), Hamburger's core fan base is perpetually tied to the underground music scene. (This explains why he performs in spots such as The Jackpot Music Hall rather than comedy clubs.)

> **"The most difficult part of marketing Neil is dealing with people who don't understand his humor. More specifically, that he is funny because he's not funny."**
>
> – Nicole Crowley, publicist for Drag City Records

"My fans are all over the place — geographically and mentally," Hamburger describes.

Hamburger also loves to make jokes (actually riddles) at the expense of current musical icons. Example: "What do you call a senior citizen who can't help but expose their genitalia in public?"

Answer: "Madonna."

"We're trying to keep things fresh," Hamburger says of his act. "You don't want to go too far out of date, so we're doing some Gerald Ford material. But you don't want to get too fresh because then you get slapped."

Hamburger says no topic is taboo for him.

"You don't want to limit yourself in this business," he says.

"Obviously, if you're doing a children's birthday party you're not going to tell your mass murder and gang rape jokes. On the other hand, when you've got some of these degenerate drunks that populate the night clubs I'm playing at, all bets are off. The only limit is you don't want to say stuff that's not funny because these people are there to laugh."

Does he often struggle with saying stuff that's not funny?

"We've had a few problems with that over the years," Hamburger admits. "You may have noticed if you've heard some of my albums. Sometimes I wish they'd used the edit button a little bit more when they're piecing those things together."

Poolside companions

Modern technology has helped Hamburger in that regard. Although he's still at the mercy of others when it comes to his audio catalog, the funnyman has found a new ally: the Internet.

Hamburger has been serving as host of his own interview show, "Poolside Chats," which can be found on comedian Tom Green's Web site (www.tomgreen.com).

"It's a TV show, and it's on the Internet, so it could conceivably be seen by every person on earth. When I'm

Lawrence Journal World — Apr 25, 2007

Taste for odd humor is Hamburger's helper

Special to the Journal-World

COMEDIAN NEIL HAMBURGER will perform at 10 p.m. today at The Jackpot Music Hall, 943 Mass. Hamburger is celebrating the release of his DVD project, "The World's Funnyman."

doing a live show, you can count the heads. We did a show in Tasmania about a week ago, and we had about 30 paid customers. You get on the Internet, you could have 30, you could have 30,000, you could have 30 million. You could conceivably have 30 billion, if the birth rate were to increase," he says.

So far guests have included comedians Andy Dick and Kyle Gass, and musicians such as Melvins singer King Buzzo. But there is one "dream guest" who Hamburger longs to interview.

"I'd sure like to get Frank Sinatra Jr. on the show. He's always been a hero of mine," he says.

Until that auspicious day, Hamburger will spend his time criss-crossing the states in his rickety economy car, earning the title of America's Funnyman. No wait ... the World's Funnyman.

As for any future local funnymen who might want to follow in the comedian's footsteps, Hamburger offers one bit of advice:

"Don't do it," he says. "This is a miserable way to live. There are not many rewards in this."

– Entertainment editor Jon Niccum can be reached at 832-7178.

The Herald-Times — February 22, 2007

What's so funny?

Or un-funny, as the case may be — here's a Q&A with Neil Hamburger that sounds like a joke. You decide.

By Dan Coleman
The Scene

Neil Hamburger has spent the past 15 years as arguably the world's worst and most beloved stand-up comic. His antagonistic humor has seen him deified in Australia, where he is treated like a national treasure, and a recent opening slot on Tenacious D's UK tour saw him garner a slew of new fans — when he wasn't being pelted with loose change and insults from 15,000 of Her Majesty's finest subjects.

Hamburger is the alter ego of musician cum magazine publisher Gregg Turkington who, with his affected awkwardness, outdated jokes and comical mis-timing, is walking in the shadow of Andy Kauffman's Tony Clifton. When not hosting his own talk show from the pool of Canadian funnyman Tom Green, Hamburger can be found on the road delighting/horrifying crowds at nearly 400 stops a year.

It is on the road that I spoke to the serially beleaguered comic as he attempted to fix a flat tire on his way to a gig and his first hot meal in days at a pizza parlor in Beaver Falls, Ore.

SCENE: You do so many shows, how can you not have money to eat?

Hamburger: I have huge debt. I am just hemorrhaging debt. All the money from my shows, the checks get paid directly to my management company because I owe

SEE HAMBURGER | PAGE S11

The Herald-Times — February 22, 2007

HAMBURGER
'World's Funnyman' has not-so-funny story

CONTINUED FROM S3

them so much money for some lawsuits from some canceled shows. We had this big booking at this casino, and they kicked me off the bill after the first night. It was supposed to be a three-month engagement, and I was fired. Well, the management company still wanted their percentages of that deal, and as a result, they sued me and they also won punitive damages, so I have to do shows for the next seven years just to pay that mess off, and they're garnishing 90 percent of my pay. It's almost like the more successful I get, the worse off I am, because I'm not getting any of this money.

S: Perhaps it's time to find new management.

H: I can't get new management because I signed a contract with these guys that goes through 2022. So I'm kind of stuck there.

S: Are you done paying off the ex-wife?

H: The ex-wife, she's got the other 10 percent of the pay. That goes to her in alimony payments and also a libel lawsuit for defamation of character, because I made a big joke about her and said she had big thighs. So it's very tough. I was going to say that if you have any money, if you could slip some to me at the show, that would help because this is a real mess.

S: If you've had such limited financial success, why don't you just call it a day?

H: I would like to call it a day. I often fantasize about suicide, hanging and that type of thing because that would give me some peace that I cannot find while on the road. So I'm inclined to agree with you. It is time to call it a day.

S: When you got into this, did you ever imagine this is how it would turn out?

H: Miserable? Yes, I did envision I would be miserable, and I am. More so knowing that you're working on some sort of hatchet piece, some sort of slanderous article, probably, and all the kind things, the generosity of my time and granting of this interview is all for nothing, because you're going to accuse me of putting on substandard shows and of having God knows what sort of diseases.

S: You're putting words in my mouth, sir.

H: No, you're putting words in mine.

S: You're on TV now and opening up for Tenacious D. Things have to be looking up somewhat?

H: We did have the luxury, because of traveling with Tenacious D, the quality of life has gone up a little bit. For instance, I requested a bucket of warm water be delivered backstage before my show, so I have something to soak my feet in, also something to drink. That was on our rider, and we got that bucket of water. So in that sense, it was a real improvement over my normal tours.

S: But in the past few years you've been elevated from "America's Funnyman" to "World's Funnyman."

H: That was just a marketing gimmick. There's no truth in that. Carrot Top does a lot better than me, so he probably deserves the title that we claimed.

S: The venue you're playing here is an all-ages venue. Are you going to tone it down for the kids?

H: Hell no. Those kids at all-ages shows are bigger degenerates than any adult I've ever met. The filth talk out of these kids, and a lot of them are having sex at very young ages. The kids of today are absolute garbage, and I will not tone down my act for these creeps.

S: Are you not a fan of kids at all? Do you feel threatened by them, or is it because you're still paying for one?

H: You see the kids today, they've got the garbage minds because of the Internet. I would love to play for some sweet kids, the "Leave it to Beaver" crowd, but they don't exist anymore. These kids are sick. They should not be at my shows; they should be at counseling. That's what they should be doing. But as long as they're at the shows, we'll take their money. Believe me.

S: What are you going to do on that day in 2022 when your contract runs out and you can stop paying off your management?

H: I'll take a day off. I haven't had a day off in 13 years. That would be a real treat.

WHO: Neil Hamburger with the Coke Dares and Thin Fevers

WHEN: 8 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: Rhino's

TICKETS: $10 at the door, or $8 in advance, available at Landlocked Music.

COURTESY PHOTO

The "anti" comedian Neil Hamburger entertains this weekend at Rhino's.

Quad-City Times — November 08, 2012

Hamburger is airing his beefs

By David Burke
dburke@qctimes.com

>>> The first question posed to Neil Hamburger is whether he's doing the interview in character or not.

"I'm definitely a character, a real nut," he sardonically replies at the start of a telephone interview.

Hamburger

Hamburger, an "anti-comedian," is the persona created by Gregg Turkington, a 44-year-old Australian-born musician-comedian.

With mussed hair, a disheveled suit and oversized glasses, Hamburger performs next week at The Establishment Theatre in Rock Island.

if you go

Who: Neil Hamburger

When: 8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 14

Where: The Establishment Theatre, 220 19th St., Rock Island

How much: $8

Information: 309-786-1111 or EstablishmentTheatre.com

Also on the Web: AmericasFunnyman.com

Q: What got you into show business?

A: I think the world needed a laugh. I tried my hand at some other professions — french fries, brain surgery, things like that — with no luck. It did seem that with laughter being the best medicine, it must be a profitable industry. It turns out it's not. But I'm still doing it nonetheless. I've got a dozen long-playing albums.

Q: Is the most recent of those "Incident at Cambridge, Mass.?"

A: That was one of these "Internet albums" that these kids like, where it's just a digital type of release. We didn't really put too much into that one. ... The real albums are the ones they press into plastic and last forever.

Our most recent album was "Live at Third Man Records," and it was produced by Jack White, who's a big rock 'n' roll sensation with the kids ... recorded in Nashville.

Q: How would you describe yourself and what you do onstage?

A: I would say it's not for everyone, describing both myself and the act. We're trying to get a lot of laughs in the old style of entertainment. I'm not going to get up there and drone on for 45 minutes about the minutiae of my day. We're gonna hit you with as many jokes as we can. A lot of them are of the unsavory style that is popular with a lot of the foulmouthed kids who like comedy these days.

Q: Is there any music or is it all comedy?

A: Sometimes we do a song or two. ... I made an album, one of these "personality albums." If William Shatner and Telly Savalas and David Hasselhoff can sing, why can't I? None of us are Pavarottis, but I did the best I can do.

I also made a record that just came out last month of musical duets with Margaret Cho, the great comedian. We went in the studio and cut a couple of songs to try and fill the gap left by Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton. ... They're not doing anything anymore, but we'll see if our record does well. It certainly does represent real effort.

UNITY FEST INTERNATIONAL
A multicultural celebration!

- ETHNIC PERFORMANCES
- INTERNATIONAL MARKET
- WORLD FOOD COURT (*TASTINGS FROM AROUND THE*

Mock Stars: Indie Comedy and the Dangerously Funny
by John Wenzel

"Generally I like the music crowd," Hamburger says. "They come prepared to laugh, and the stages are nice and dirty. Some of those comedy clubs have vomit on the stage, too, since comedians have problems with their nerves. But music stages have fewer bodily fluids."

Tenacious D movie *The Pick of Destiny*, and even his own online offering, TomGreen.com's *Poolside Chats with Neil Hamburger*.

"It's probably the most freewheeling talk show I've ever seen," he says of that program, which was on hiatus as of our interview. "It was great to sit by the pool and take the calls from all the degenerates. Most of the people calling were trying to cause trouble. It was a mess, but people loved it. Lots of swearing and drinking and catastrophes and technical problems. Weird people dropped by and invaded the show, like that drug addict Steve-O from *Jackass*." (And, it must be noted, underground music icons King Buzzo of The Melvins and Will Oldham.)

Mencia or Dane Cook would. It takes patience, smarts, and a warped sense of humor to appreciate Hamburger, but his late-2000s uptick of screen and touring activity prove that more people are getting the joke.

In typical fashion, he discounts it: "Sure, high-visibility people might know who you are, but are you getting the good seats at the restaurants? No, you're not even getting into the restaurants because you're not making enough money to eat there."

One more thing: Hamburger isn't real, even though his creator fights admirably to keep him looking that way.

"Since I stopped doing the second-string comedy circuit, the pizza-parlor and Indian-casino scene has dried up," Hamburger told me a few days before the Larimer Lounge set. "I began working almost exclusively at the music clubs. And the clubs first said, 'Neil, I don't think this is going to work,' but honestly the attendance has been much better at the music clubs, and a lot more comedians are touring exclusively at the music clubs. These kids are all eager to see something else. See, my records had been released on the Drag City label, so we thought, 'Let's take it to these clubs.' A lot of these people buying my records have never set foot in a comedy club in their lives."

From Penthouse magazine, February 2007

By John Bolster

TRADING PUNCH LINES WITH COMEDY'S BEST

Neil Hamburger

Neil Hamburger is making a name for himself as the king of anti-comedy. His sad-sack, bumbling onstage persona is so spectacularly unfunny it's funny, and people are catching on. Hamburger just finished an international tour with Tenacious D (and a role in their recent film) and came out with his ninth full-length release.

You've always been known as "America's Funnyman," but your new DVD is titled *The World's Funnyman*. How did you make that leap?
The marketing people put their heads together and came up with that—"the World's Funnyman." The title had not yet been claimed.
It was open?
It was open, and that's the weird thing: People have got all the good titles. You've got the King of Siam and things like that—those titles have long since been claimed. This one was free. It was real fortunate that we got ahold of it, because if we *didn't*, Carrot Top or someone like that was gonna get it.
You've been on *Jimmy Kimmel Live* a couple of times. Did you have any advice for Kimmel?
Oh, boy. I wish I had some advice for that man, but he's done quite well for himself. Most of these young comedians don't do as well as he has. For *them*, I do have some advice: Just give it up. You're competing with me for bookings.
Get out of the game.
Get out of the game and leave it to me. Because if all that's left in the world are two comedians—Kimmel, who has a TV show, so he can't go on the road; and *me*, with nothing, no future, so I *can*—then all the bookings are going to come my way.
On the back of your latest DVD, you are pictured with three attractive young blonde girls—
Could you believe that?
Do you get a lot of groupies on the road, or was that just a lightning-strike kind of thing?
That was a show in Orlando, Florida, where these girls approached me and wanted to take a photo with me. They knew the catchphrases, they knew all about the zipper lips and "that's my life!" And of course, that's a photograph we will use forever—because of the rarity of the situation. Although my people have been telling me that my demographic has been moving more toward the women. I can't figure out why.
That's a positive development, though, right?
I believe it is. I'd like to see more of it, but ever since I went through this divorce, it's like you're wearing one of these scarlet letters or something, you know?
You're branded.
They seem to have an understanding that this is damaged goods here, and it's not something you want to partake in. That is sad. Maybe some of the girls who work there at your magazine could take pity on me.... Is there going to be a magazine-release party?
We'll certainly keep you in mind.
Please, let me know. Especially if it takes place in one of the states that I normally perform in—Nebraska, South Dakota, that type of thing. That would be very convenient for me.
And we'd probably be looking for an emcee, so ...
Of course, I love emcee work because ... it's work. So I would be available for that, or anything. I'll come to the opening of a bottle.
You just mentioned that you're divorced, but I noticed you're wearing a wedding ring in your DVD. Is that old footage?
No, it's just—I'm not gonna take that off. I took a vow. I held up my end of it, and she didn't. So as far as I'm concerned, we're still married. Now, it has been several years since the divorce and she has re-wed, but ...
You're still holding up your end.
Yes, because I follow through on my commitments. You try and find—with your muckraking journalism—you try and find one club owner who tells you that I didn't show up to do the show. You'll never find it. You might find club owners who say they booked me for a week and canceled the booking after the first night. But that's not my fault.
What's next for Neil Hamburger?
Oh, boy. Well, more shows. You can bet on that. There has not been a day off in many years. Other than these cancellation days, but I don't consider that very restful, when you have somebody yelling at you.

"Of course, I love emcee work because ... it's work. So I would be available for that, or anything. I'll come to the opening of a bottle."

Photograph by James Macklan

From High Society magazine, November 2005

Neil Hamburger: Is This the Future of Comedy?

Interview by Dan Kapelovitz

Yuckin' it up with America's most disturbing funnyman

DEPENDING ON YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR, YOU'LL THINK NEIL HAMBURGER IS EITHER THE GREATEST STANDUP COMIC ON EARTH OR THE WORST. HE (PURPOSELY?) MESSES UP JOKES, MAKES HORRIBLE HACKING-COUGH NOISES BEFORE HIS PUNCH-LINES, READS HIS MATERIAL FROM A CHEAT-SHEET AND IS KNOWN TO RAMBLE ON DEPRESSINGLY ABOUT SUICIDE. MANY OF HIS "JOKES" ARE SO SUBTLE THAT IT MAY TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO REALIZE WHAT YOU JUST HEARD WAS INDEED HILARIOUS.

Hamburger appears on-stage with combed-over greasy-looking hair, wearing a tuxedo and nerdy black glasses. He looks like a cross between a member of the Rat Pack and a resident of a mental-institution.

Simultaneously holding three drinks, Hamburger spills them all over the front of his tux until he eventually drops the half-filled cups and they crash onto the floor. A few times throughout his show, with various degrees of enthusiasm, Hamburger says, "But thaaaaaat's my life," his lame attempt to create a nation-sweeping catch-phrase.

Photo by CECILE PARTRIDGE

Some critics have dubbed Hamburger's brand of humor "anti-comedy," but "meta-comedy" is perhaps a more apt description. Although Hamburger would steadfastly deny this, his act can be interpreted as a genius satirical critique of stand-up comedy itself. Hamburger is like a conceptual artist who uses comedy as his medium. On one record, there's almost five minutes where the humorist performs some sort of visual comedy and the only audible sounds are those of a bartender scooping ice, sporadic laughter and other ambient noises.

Hamburger's comedy album, "50 States, 50 Laughs," is just 50 jokes, each one devoted to a different state. (Sample: "Why did Kentucky Fried Chicken change its name to KFC? Because they were ashamed of the state's low SAT scores.") While Hamburger isn't yet a household name (at least not with the word "Neil" in front of it), the stand-up comic has appeared on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" and has a cult following which includes many rock stars who often invite him to be their warm-up act. But not everyone appreciates Hamburger's wit. Audience members heckle him, call him an idiot, leave in mid-set, throw things, mess with his microphone when he's recording his performances, and even get violent. I met the master comedian at the Trader Vic's restaurant in Merv Griffin's Beverly Hilton Hotel.

HIGH SOCIETY: ***Do clubs ever get mad at you for breaking their glasses?***

HAMBURGER: One club was gonna pay me $2.75 for the show, and the two glasses came to $2.98; so I ended up owing them. Needless to say, we snuck out without paying; so the night wasn't a total loss.

HS: ***Is it true that you do entire shows in which every joke is about how the members of the Red Hot Chili Peppers are junkies?***

HAMBURGER: We have done that.

From High Society magazine, November 2005

HS: *Do they get angry with you about that?*
HAMBURGER: These are the guys with the filthy socks over their penises; so if they can't take a little joshing, what's this world coming to? If they wanna make fun of me during their set, hey, I welcome it.

HS: *What's been you're biggest gig?*
HAMBURGER: We had a show in Sydney, Australia, where there must have been 50,000 kids. [I opened for] the Foo Fighters. We had a swell time except for the shoes and the rocks and the coins they were throwing. Those Australian 50-cent coins have sharp edges.

HS: *Isn't prostitution legal in Australia? Did you hire any hookers?*
HAMBURGER: I can't even afford to give a tip to a cute waitress.

HS: *What other countries have you been to?*
HAMBURGER: Well, we did an album in Malaysia. That didn't go so well. We had a layover because we were doing some shows in Australia. To get the good air fares, we had to take a Malaysian airline. We said, "We've got 22 hours here; let's make something happen." So we got in touch with some of the tourist hotels and got this show. We were not invited back.

Photo by GIDDLE PARTRIDGE

Masturbator and Commander: Hamburger at the helm.

"What was Elvis Presley's worst release? *The ejaculation containing Lisa Marie.*"

HS: *Do people there speak English?*
HAMBURGER: I don't think so, because they weren't laughing.

HS: *Couldn't you have performed your visual comedy?*
HAMBURGER: We have a whole X-rated hot-dog vendor routine which is out of this world. Marcel Marceau, watch out. It's 200 years of visual comedy rolled up into four minutes. You've got everything from balloon tricks to hot dogs being sliced up to an obscene gesture or two. We've had to cut that because my health hasn't been as good, and it's harder to do the quick moves you need to do with the visual comedy.

HS: *What health problems are you having?*
HAMBURGER: It's more what health problems am I not having.

HS: *What health problems are you not having?*
HAMBURGER: Well, I guess I don't have low blood pressure.

HS: *You're making a movie?*
HAMBURGER: It's a remake of the "Left For Dead In Malaysia" album that we did, but with some other twists and turns and characters and explosions and all kinds of wacky things. This could be big.

HS: *Do you play yourself?*
HAMBURGER: Oh, yeah. Why should the money go to, you know, Chevy Chase to play me?

HS: *Would you ever star in a porn film?*
HAMBURGER: That's something I would like to get into at some point, maybe when I'm in my 80s.

HS: *What's the worst crowd reaction you've ever had?*
HAMBURGER: This guy at the

Yosemite National Park was mad because the jokes were booming out through the canyon. He said, "If I wanted to hear all these fucking jokes about faggots and fucking swearing up a storm, I would have taken my kid to San Francisco." The park had to give back all his campground fees.

HS: *Do you like musical comedic acts like Tenacious D?*
HAMBURGER: We did a sold-out show with those guys, and we did one dollar in business. One button. I've had shows for three people where we did more merchandise than that.

HS: *You seem to have many celebrity fans?*
HAMBURGER: We have a lot of them. We're trying to get Jimmy Carter on board.

HS: *Who's your favorite President?*
HAMBURGER: I like William Henry Harrison, John Quincy Adams—Calvin Coolidge is cool. Of course, we did a tribute record to Richard Milhous Nixon. We re-recorded the great speeches of Richard Nixon, from the Checkers speech to the 1962 "You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore" speech, to the acceptance speech and the resignation speech. This was not a funny project. This was deadly serious, and we recorded these with the utmost respect.

HS: *Why wouldn't people just listen to the original Nixon recordings?*
HAMBURGER: Well, those records are out of print. Mine's in print.

HS: *How many tuxedos do you own?*
HAMBURGER: We have the black tux; we have the red tux, and if you turn the red tux inside out, it's sort of a light-red tux. So I'd say three.

HS: *Where do you live?*
HAMBURGER: I have a storage locker in La Verne. I used to have an apartment, but when you're on the road all year, what's the point?

HS: *What's your sex life like on tour?*
HAMBURGER: I don't really have time for that. I can barely keep up with some of these TV sitcoms, let alone something that's a two-way street.

HS: *Have you ever been date-raped?*
HAMBURGER: Not that I recall.

HS: *Do you get seriously ill children who request to see you perform before they die?*

A SAMPLE OF HAMBURGER'S OEUVRE

Why did E.T., the Extra Terrestrial, love Reeses Pieces?
Because they have the same flavor that cum does on his home planet.

Why did Britney Spears have sex with her coke dealer?
She wanted to get back at the Pepsi people for dropping her as a spokesperson.

What's the difference between Eminem and M&Ms?
M&Ms have better tattoos.

Why did the Backstreet Boys engage in anal sex?
Because they were feeling disconnected from their music.

What do you get when you cross Sir Elton John with a sabertooth tiger?
I don't know, but you better keep it away from your ass.

Why did the Scientologist cross the road?
To buy a thousand copies of Dianetics *to keep it on the New York Times bestseller list.*

Why did the U.S. government hire a former hot-dog vendor to pull the switch that executed Timothy McVeigh?
They thought he might relish the job.

Did you hear that Timothy McVeigh murdered a million people the night before he was executed?
Yeah, he ejaculated on the floor.

Why did God invent Fleetwood Mac?
Because he was high on PCP.

Why did God make homosexuality a sin?
Because his boyfriend said it would be more of a turn-on that way.

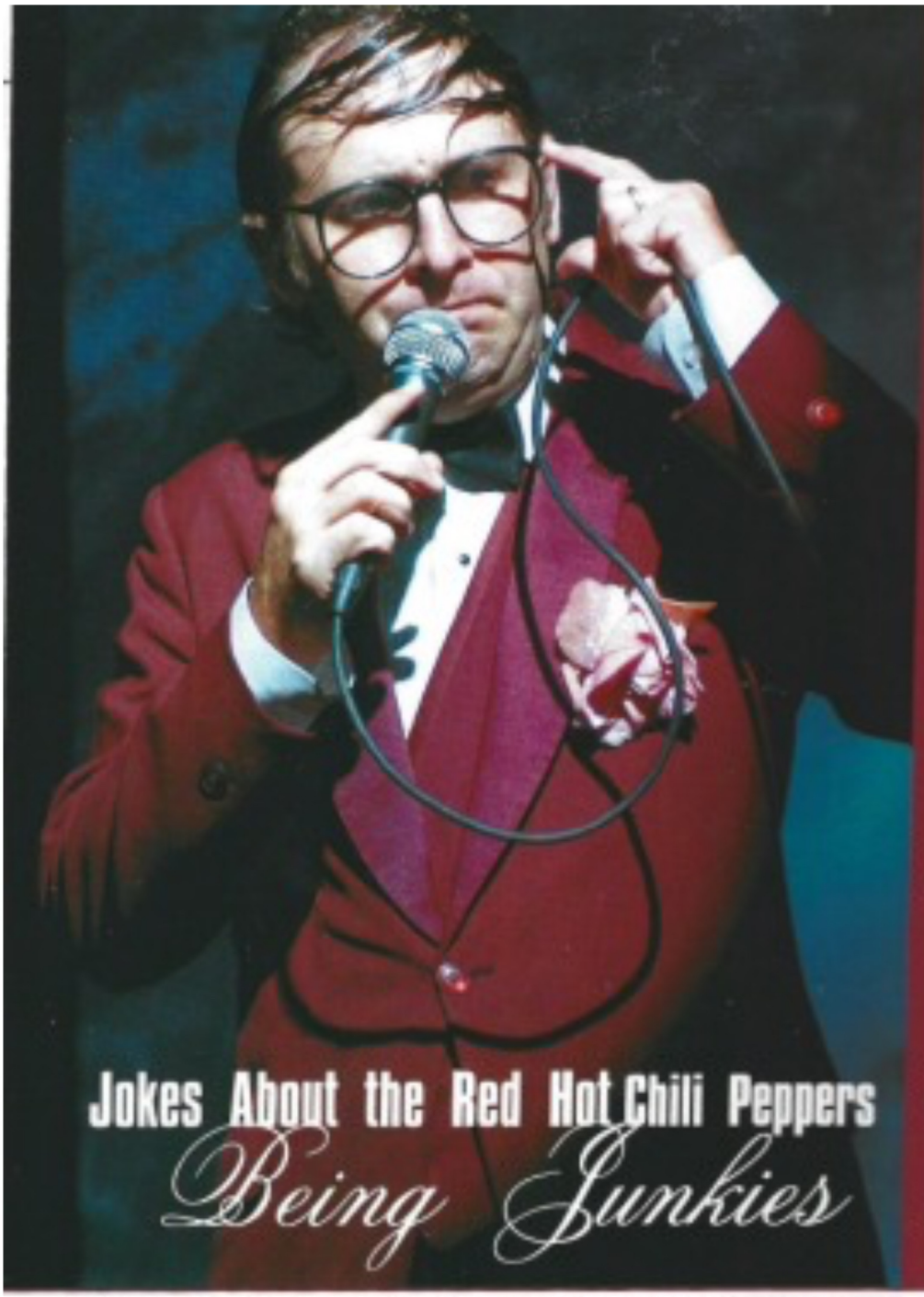
Why have there been more U.S Presidents born in Ohio than any other state?
Because the nearest abortionists were two states away.

My 12-year-old daughter gave me a G-string the other day.
Hey, come on, I play the guitar. She gave me an E-string the week before.

Why does Britney Spears sell millions of copies of her albums?
Because the public is horny and depressed.

Why does Kentucky Fried Chicken come in a bucket?
So you have something to throw up in afterward.

From High Society magazine, November 2005



Jokes About the Red Hot Chili Peppers *Being Junkies*

How many Red Hot Chili Peppers does it take to screw in a light bulb?
It depends on how recently they've shot up.

Why did the Red Hot Chili Peppers cross the road?
Because they were running away from the re-hab clinic.

Why are the Red Hot Chili Peppers' veins in danger of collapsing?
Because they've had so many hits.

What do you get when you cross the Red Hot Chili Peppers with an Octopus?
Junkies who have eight arms to shoot up into.

What brand of guitar is endorsed by Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist John Frusciante?
The Matha-tone.

What did the Red Hot Chili Peppers do after the label representative visited them in the recording studio to notify the band that the label was not satisfied with their lastest tracks?
They put on long-sleeved shirts.

Why did Grammy Award-winning composer Anthony Kiedis of the Red Hot Chili Peppers drag a young girl into the bathroom with him?
Because he needed her to pee into a cup so he could pass his drug test.

HAMBURGER: We haven't been able to tap into that market.

HS: ***Tell us a joke.***
HAMBURGER: "Why did Julia Roberts rub shit on her vagina? Because she was horny."

HS: ***Who are your influences?***
HAMBURGER: Why should I give them credit? The one time that you guys are gonna devote press to me, and you wanna turn half the article over to these other guys? They never mention me when they're [in magazines]. Carrot Top mentioned me in an interview. The interviewer said, "Have you ever heard of Neil Hamburger?" He said, "Neil Hamburger? Never heard of him."

HS: ***Tell us about your Princess Di tribute album.***
HAMBURGER: Elton John came out with this tribute to Princess Diana. All he did was change a couple of words, and it was the biggest-selling record of all time. So I said, "I'm not gonna get the biggest-selling record of all time, but maybe I can get the 10th biggest." So we took a couple of my old routines and changed a couple of words, re-recorded them, and put it out with Princess Diana on the cover. All proceeds were directed to go to the Princess Diana Fund. Not my cut, but the retailers were encouraged to send their cut to the fund.

HS: ***What words did you change to turn it into a tribute to Diana?***
HAMBURGER: It was the "Zipper Lips" routine with a few Princess Diana jokes tacked on at the beginning. "Why did the chicken cross the road? To take a photograph of Princess Diana dead in her car."

HS: ***Did you ask, "Why did Princess Diana rub shit on her vagina?"***
HAMBURGER: No, because she

Photo by GIDDLE HAMBURGER

From High Society magazine, November 2005

"Why have there been more U.S. Presidents born in Ohio than any other state? *Because the nearest abortionists were two states away.*"

Photo by EDDIE PARTRIDGE

What, No Hamburger Helper? The forlorn funnyman sulks at Trader Vic's.

never did that. You gotta be careful with slander.

HS: *How does "Zipper Lips" apply to Princess Diana?*
HAMBURGER: It doesn't, but how does "Candle In The Wind" apply to Princess Diana?

HS: *You do a Rich Little impersonation?*
HAMBURGER: We were doing that until market research showed that nobody remembers Rich Little.

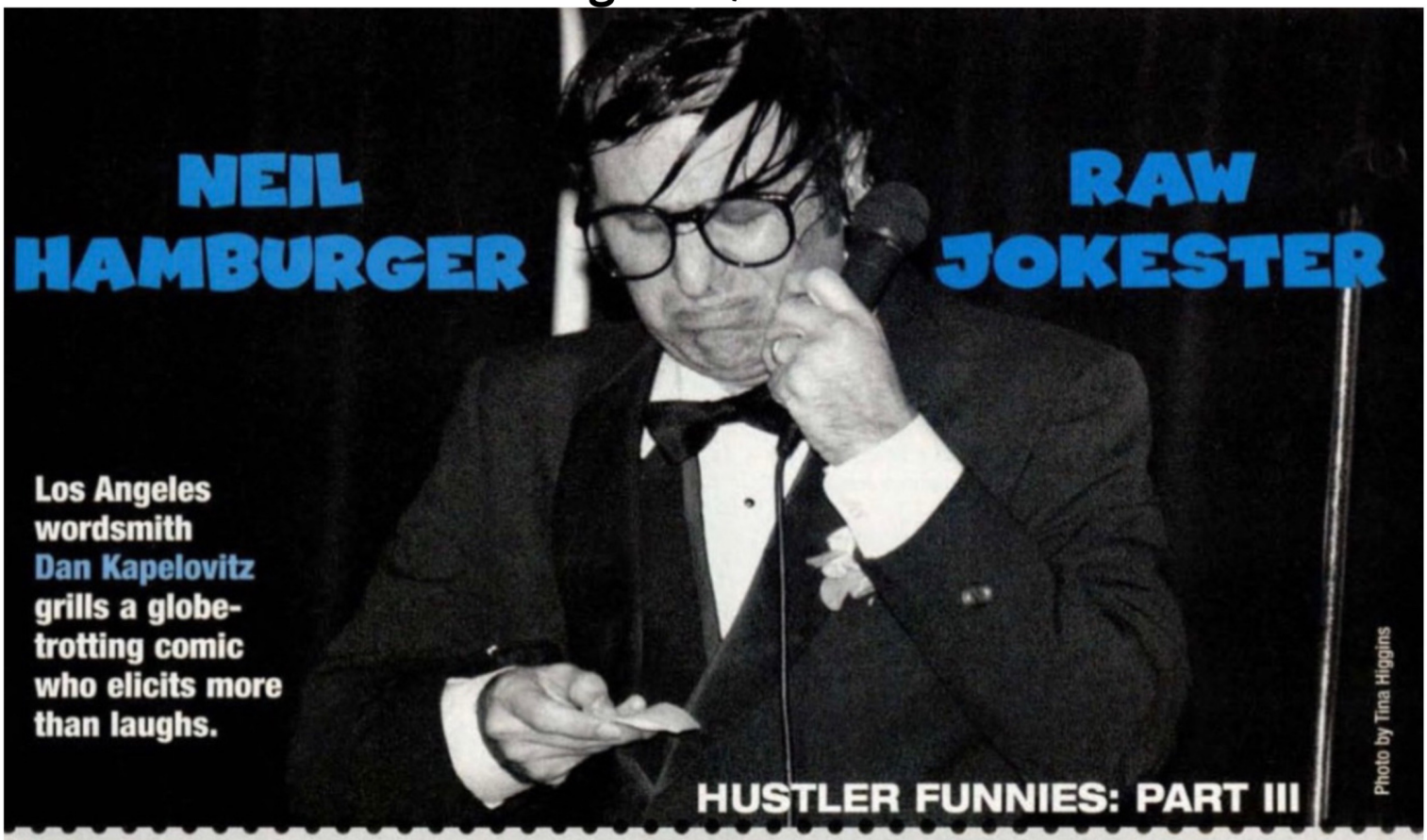
HS: *How many times have you done "Jimmy Kimmel Live"?*
HAMBURGER: I believe it's been two times now, not counting the reruns.

HS: *Were there issues with the censors?*
HAMBURGER: They thought some of the jokes were off-color; so we had to cut them. They found this unsuitable: "What was Elvis Presley's worst release? The ejaculation containing Lisa Marie."

HS: *Do you have any Michael Jackson jokes?*
HAMBURGER: Oh, boy, do I ever. That is one of the topics you can't stop joking about in this business. We brought the house down on "Jimmy Kimmel Live." "Why did Michael Jackson get a vasectomy? Because he was worried about the impact it would have on his career were he to get one of these eight-year-old boys pregnant."

HS: *You often speak of suicide in your act. What do you think is the best way to kill yourself?*
HAMBURGER: Taking lots of vitamins until you become so strong and so happy that you live to be very old, and then you pass away in your sleep. But technically, it's a suicide because, initially, you took the vitamins to die.

NEIL HAMBURGER RAW JOKESTER



Los Angeles wordsmith Dan Kapelovitz grills a globe-trotting comic who elicits more than laughs.

Photo by Tina Higgins

HUSTLER FUNNIES: PART III

Photo by Dan Kapelovitz

Depending on who you ask, Neil Hamburger is either the greatest standup comedian on Earth or the worst (his true ambition). A typical joke goes like this: "Why does E.T., the Extra-Terrestrial, like Reese's Pieces so much? Because on his planet, that's what cum tastes like." While his bits are sometimes funny—or so intentionally unfunny that they still get a laugh—Hamburger's act is more than just the sum of his one-liners. HUSTLER sits down with the comic "master" to fill in a few blanks.

HUSTLER: Who's your favorite comedian?

NEIL HAMBURGER: Probably the one who passes away, thus freeing up a booking for me. If they'd all die, I'd have a monopoly. There're 300 million people in America; if I even get half a cent from each one of them, I'll be doing pretty good.

What's been your biggest gig?

We had a show in Sydney, Australia, at the Olympic Stadium where there must have been 50,000 kids. The Foo Fighters headlined. We had a swell time with that one except for the shoes, rocks and coins they were throwing. Those Australian 50-cent coins have sharp edges.

What other memorable objects have come your way?

I've had traffic pylons thrown at me.

Photo by Dan Kapelovitz

You seem to anger some people.

This guy at a campground at the Yosemite National Park was mad because the jokes were booming out through the canyon. The park had to give back all his campground fees. It was a vicious, ugly scene. He said to me, "If I wanted to hear all these fucking jokes about faggots and fucking, swearing up a storm, I would have taken my kid to San Francisco."

Have you ever tried to win over a hostile audience member?

In Darwin, Australia, this guy, who was about 17, was mad. I quickly realized the psychology involved and offered him some of my whiskey. Here's a kid who's underage, never gets to drink. He'd rather drink than punch me; so he took it and left.

What's your sex life like on tour?

I don't have time for that. I can barely keep up with TV sitcoms, let alone something that's a two-way street.

Do you ever hire hookers?

No. How could I afford to do something like that? I can't even afford to give a tip to a cute waitress.

Would you ever star in a porn film?

That's something I would like to get into maybe when I'm in my 80s.

Do you have any Britney Spears jokes?

Why did Britney Spears have sex with her coke dealer? Because she wanted to get back at the Pepsi people for dropping her as spokesperson. It's funnier with an audience.

What abut Eminem jokes?

What's the difference between Eminem and M&Ms? M&Ms have better tattoos.

Michael Jackson jokes?

Why did Michael Jackson dangle his infant son from the balcony of his hotel room? He was punishing his boy for refusing to finish his plate of sperm. We brought the house down on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*. That [joke] was preapproved.

What wasn't preapproved?

Why did Michael Jackson get a vasectomy? Because he was worried about the impact on his career were he to get one of these eight-year-old boys pregnant. That one didn't make the grade.

We saw a Kimmel broadcast that kept cutting to shots of the audience not laughing at your jokes.

No, everyone there was laughing. That was stock footage from when Carrot Top was on.

How many times have you done *Jimmy Kimmel Live*?

Two times now, not counting the reruns.

Besides the Michael Jackson bits, were there issues with the censors?

They thought some of the jokes were off-color; so we had to cut them.

Give us a casualty.

What was Elvis Presley's worst release? The ejaculation containing Lisa Marie. They found this unsuitable.

Anything else HUSTLER readers should know?

I don't really think they're reading this article, do you?

You never know.

Photo by Tina Higgins

ask neil hamburger

Each issue, comedian Neil Hamburger will answer Arthur readers' queries about relationships, career, sexual practices, table manners and particle physics. Email your questions to cuckold@arthurmag.com and we will pass them along to Neil at our next Cappuccino Blast party. For this special premier issue of Arthur, we didn't have any questions from our readers for Neil, mostly because we don't have any readers yet. So we adapted the following questions from Rupert Murdoch's British tabloid, *The Sun*.

NEIL HAMBURGER SAYS HIS NEXT COMEDY ALBUM, LAUGH BUT LOUD, IS DUE SOON ON DRAG CITY RECORDS. FOR MORE INFORMATION, SAY HELLO TO HTTP://NEILHAMBURGER.TYMEAVEN.COM

Her Calls and Texts Are So Erotic

I am 22 and living with my 20-year-old girlfriend of two years and our baby son. Our relationship is routine and boring. I've never been in love with her and only stayed because of the baby and because it was somewhere to live. My life changed a few months ago when I met this beautiful, intelligent older woman. We met at the gym where she works out most days. She doesn't look anywhere near her true age. I am younger than her children but I don't care about the age difference between us, although she does. She asked me out for a drink and afterwards we went back to her house and ended up making love. She is the most fantastic lover a man could wish for. Her calls and texts are so erotic, I'm addicted. She asks what underwear I like, then buys it for me. She laughs at my jokes, listens to everything I say and she's only interested in me. Even without sex, being with her is good fun. We recently sat on the beach for hours just talking - something I've never done with my partner. But my lover is married and says she will never leave her husband. They live in a fabulous house and I think it's only the money that keeps them together. I've promised my lover that if ever I win the Lottery I will take her away with me. She agrees we could be blissfully happy together if we had money. She is going away on holiday soon and I worry she will meet another young guy who does have money and head off with him instead. I'm pretty sure my girlfriend knows something is going on because of the text messages. I feel bad but I can't live without this woman. My partner is trying hard to please me but I just want my lover. Will she ever leave her husband so I can have her to myself?

–Who's Laughing Now

Dear Who's, I can relate to your wish to win the Lottery. But the rest of your problem is somewhat foreign to me. I haven't had this sort of situation, unfortunately. You say, "She laughs at my jokes." I would love to meet a woman that would laugh at MY jokes. It seems that at far as that is concerned, sir, you HAVE won the Lottery! A lot of times I have done shows to huge crowds and received no laughs at all. Here you have a situation where this woman laughs at your jokes...and still you complain! I don't understand what your problem is. Except where you say "I worry that she will meet another young guy who does have money, and head off with him instead". Because I've had that happen to me, which ruined my marriage. Except that it wasn't a young guy...it was a dentist! So my advice is, yes, keep playing the Lottery. And suggest to your ladyfriend that she brushes her teeth three times a day, thus ensuring that she stays away from the dentist. A good, name-brand baking soda-based toothpaste should solve your problem, as it neutralizes the acids that cause cavities.

It Was A Bit Rough But It Was The Best I Ever Had

I'm a 17-year-old girl and this happened after I'd gone to a nightclub with some of my mates. After a few hours they were bored and decided to go on somewhere else but I wanted to stay as I'd seen a really cute guy standing at the bar. He'd been looking at me all evening and when they left he came over and bought me a drink. We got chatting and seemed to hit it off straight away. At the end of the evening he said he'd walk me home but as we started walking down an alleyway he suddenly pushed me against the wall and started kissing me. I was surprised at first but we ended up having sex. It was a bit rough but it was the best I'd ever had. Now I'm desperate to see him again. I've looked out for him in the club and around town but he's nowhere to be found. I don't know whether to tell my mates or keep it to myself.

–Likes It Rough

Dear Likes, This happens to me all the time. People leaving nightclubs to have sex, thus missing my act. Oftentimes they leave shortly after my set starts, which doesn't look good in the eyes of the club owner. These nightclubs are reluctant to book you a second time if people are walking out during your set, whether it's to have "rough sex" or just to get some cigarettes across the street. It's people like you who are ruining my career. Yes, I do have some advice to you! Next time you are out at one of these nightclubs, watch ALL the acts on the bill, particularly the comedy segments of the night. Be patient—and THEN go home and have your rough sex, however you want to have it. It's just common courtesy.

I Could Hardly Believe My Eyes When I Discovered the Vibrator

My girlfriend and I are both in our thirties and have been together for three years. Last weekend she went to her mum's with our baby daughter so I could decorate our bedroom. As I tidied the wardrobe a bag fell out and curiosity made me peep inside. I could hardly believe my eyes when I discovered the vibrator. I haven't mentioned it to her yet. I'm so confused and upset I don't know how to deal with my feelings. Should I say anything? *–Seeing Is Believing*

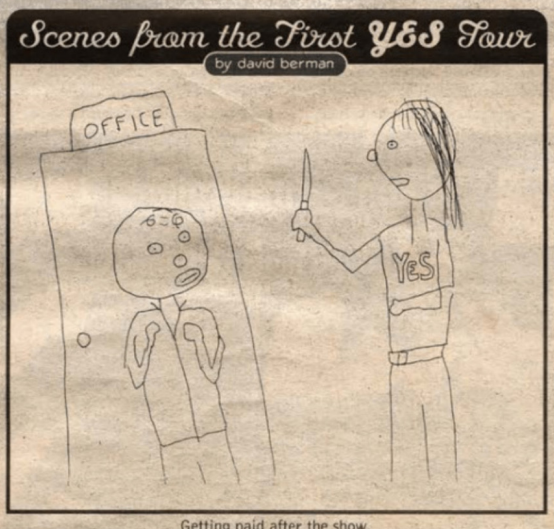
Dear Seeing, This is a very modern age, so this is the sort of problem that comes up now and again. Unfortunately, we men have to accept the fact that we are now replaceable, because of the invention of the battery. You can say something to your girlfriend, but you'll probably be told that you are impeding "progress," that you are a fossil, a relic of a bygone era. Nowadays they have computers that can do anything...including comedy routines! The old-style comedian, such as myself, must make do with bookings in smaller towns in which the computer age has not yet arrived. This is why I have so many bookings in Oklahoma. This is what I suggest you do: find one of these small-town girls who has not yet been exposed to the new technology, who still believes in the simple things, like the human touch.

I Love Him When He's Being Kind But Not When He's A Sexual Deviant

I am 29, my husband is 39 and we've been married just over a year. When we met he was everything I ever wanted in a man and—as a bonus—he accepted my son who absolutely idolizes him. But things started to go wrong within weeks of marrying. He likes to experiment sexually and his sexual demands are getting worse. I go along with his wishes to keep him happy but I don't enjoy most of it. Stupidly, I agreed to a threesome. He found her through an advert. She was quite matter-of-fact but I had to drink a bottle of wine before I could go through with it. I feel totally worthless now and I can't understand why he needs someone else if he loves me. I have refused to do it again but he won't stop asking. What am I going to do? I love him when he's kind and gentle, but not when he's trying to be a sexual deviant. *–Liquored Up*

"I GO ALONG WITH HIS WISHES TO KEEP HIM HAPPY BUT I DON'T ENJOY MOST OF IT."

Dear Liquored Up, I see what you mean. I had a show booked recently in Denver, Colorado, at a little nightclub there. It was supposed to be just myself and my opening act, Pleaseeasaur, which is also a comedy-oriented act—we often travel as a package deal. Anyway, we both arrived in Denver early, prepared to do this show...but when we got there, we found that a "third party" had been added to the bill, making the night a "threesome," as you call it. I felt totally worthless because I had believed that we were able to perform adequately for the Denver audience without needing another act on the bill to keep the evening going. And to make matters worse, this third party, a band called The Fire Show, sat in the back of the club all night saying bad things about my act, and about Pleaseeasaur. I had to drink a bottle of wine before I could sit through their set. But you know what? We were vindicated, in that no one bought any of this third party's merchandise afterwards—not a single thing! Yet we sold quite a few Neil Hamburger souvenir CDs, fridge magnets, buttons and T-shirts. So my advice is to hang in there, because, as the legendary entertainer Phil Harris used to say, "Cream always rises to the top."



Getting paid after the show.

From The Daily Iowan — September 12, 2008

Where's the (comedic) beef?

What do you get when you cross Elton John and a saber-toothed tiger? Find out this off-color punch line and more from comedian Neil Hamburger tonight at the Picador.

By Jarrett Hothan
THE DAILY IOWAN

For any impressionable young class clowns looking to get into the standup-comedy business, "America's Funnyman" Neil Hamburger has some words of advice.

"It is a nightmare industry," he said. "You would have a lot more success getting into the mining industry, for instance, the salt-ining industry, or for any other mineral."

Hamburger has been touring relentlessly on the comedy circuit for more than a decade now, bringing his trademark brand of showmanship even to such network programs as "Jimmy Kimmel Live." He will appear today at 9 p.m. at the Picador, 330 E. Washington St., in a rare comedy performance at the venue.

His brand of comedy is somewhat of a throwback, akin to the brash but traditional styling of Andy Kaufman's impetuous alter-ego Tony Clifton. Perpetually dressed in a suit with a comb over glimmering with a handful of pomade, Hamburger's show harks back to the days when comedians shot jokes like machine-gun bullets.

"Comedians these days, I don't think they're funny," Hamburger lamented. "They just come on stage wearing a dirty T-shirt stained with lasagna from last night. Then they talk about what happened to them today, and then 10 to 15 minutes later, there is the punch line. I believe if you paid the money to get in, you should give them a laugh every few minutes."

Hamburger's delightfully offpace routine, often interrupted with bouts of repulsive throat clearing (he claims his voice has aged prematurely), takes aim at vulnerable pop-culture figures such as Elton John, Paris Hilton, and Michael Jackson.

> 'Comedians these days, I don't think they're funny. They just come on stage wearing a dirty T-shirt stained with lasagna from last night.'
> **Neil Hamburger, comedian**

His crude delivery has gained fans in the punk-rock community, causing many bands to invite the comedian to open for them on tours and have him make vocal appearances on their records. This phenomenon is confusing to him.

"For some reason, these people associate themselves with me," he said. "Have you ever listened to their music? It sounds like someone crapping into a bowl — and those are the good songs."

Hamburger is no stranger to the world of music; he recently recorded his own country-western album, *Sings Country Winners*. The country twang is a perfect background for such songs as "Jug Town," where he fondly weaves a tale of a father's raging alcoholism.

"It's something you want to have success with in life," he said. "David Hasselhoff has several albums to his name. A lot of these guys are not Sinatra, but then again, nobody is buying these comedy records."

On stage, Hamburger is rarely seen without at least four or five drinks in his grasp. For fans looking to buy him a drink after the show, his favorite is a rare recipe.

"Fifty percent ice cubes, a couple shots of vodka, and then bleach to clean out the parasites," Hamburger said. "I know it's not very healthy. I don't want to recommend it to your reading audience."

E-mail *DI* reporter **Jarrett Hothan** at: jarrett-hothan@uiowa.edu

dailyiowan.com

GIVE A LISTEN
Neil Hamburger
Sings Country Winners
Featured Tracks:
• "Jug Town"
If you like it:
See comedian **NEIL HAMBURGER**, 9 p.m. today, Picador, 330 E. Washington, $5.

From The Winnipeg Sun — June 14, 2006

A little taste of Hamburger

DAVID SCHMEICHEL
Entertainment Reporter
dschmeichel@wpgsun.com

As anyone who's caught Neil Hamburger's standup act knows, sometimes a bomb can be even funnier than a joke that leaves 'em rolling in the aisles.

But then again, sometimes not.

Hamburger — he of the nervous manner, sweaty comb-over, and constant throat-clearing — is definitely an acquired taste. Either you think his awful one-liners are hilarious, or his more-miss-than-hit stage patter leaves you cold.

We're in the former camp, so we were thrilled to chew the fat with "America's Funnyman," whose moniker should get an upgrade thanks to the international performances documented in upcoming DVD *That's Not Gold. That's Dung.*

Here's a taste:

Sun: So where are you calling us from?

Neil Hamburger: Today we are in Laverne, Calif. If you look on your map you'll find it, but after you've found it, get some of that liquid paper and blot it out, so you never end up here. I do shows in Laverne pretty often. There's a pizza parlour in town that still has me in.

Sun: So you still get a chance to play pizza parlour shows?

Hamburger: The pizza parlour circuit for comedians has pretty much died out ... The ones that are left don't bother trying to make Monday and Tuesday nights special by having these kinds of comedy promotions. Fortunately there's a lot of these music clubs now, and these rock 'n' roll kids who are all souped-up on God knows what.

Sun: Are pizza parlour audiences very attentive?

Hamburger: You'd get the people who would try to stare you down — they think if they give you a nasty enough glare that you'll just stop or break, like you're made of glass ... Then you get the people who don't seem attentive, in fact it appears they're ignoring you, but then they end up writing a letter to the local paper saying "This was a disgrace." You tend to lose those bookings.

Sun: And the rock 'n' roll kids?

Hamburger: Oh, these are good kids. A lot of them have severe emotional problems, but they come out and laugh and have a good time and that is my crowd. I don't know if you pay attention to what is happening in society today ... but there's a lot of swearing and cursing and foul language that's become so popular we've had to incorporate that into nearly every joke.

HAMBURGER: Grinds out the jokes.

Sun: We've heard a lot recently about how comics try to avoid telling jokes with set-ups and punchlines. But jokes are your whole act. What gives?

Hamburger: Well a lot of these comics, let's face it, are not very funny people. Somehow they've hooked into this system ... where you go up onstage and talk about the most mundane things that happened to you that day. It could be as mundane as buying potato chips at the supermarket, and they'll stretch this little story out so it lasts 10 minutes and there's no pay-off ... I think if you can tell three jokes in one minute, it's better than rambling on about what your stewardess said or didn't say for 10 minutes.

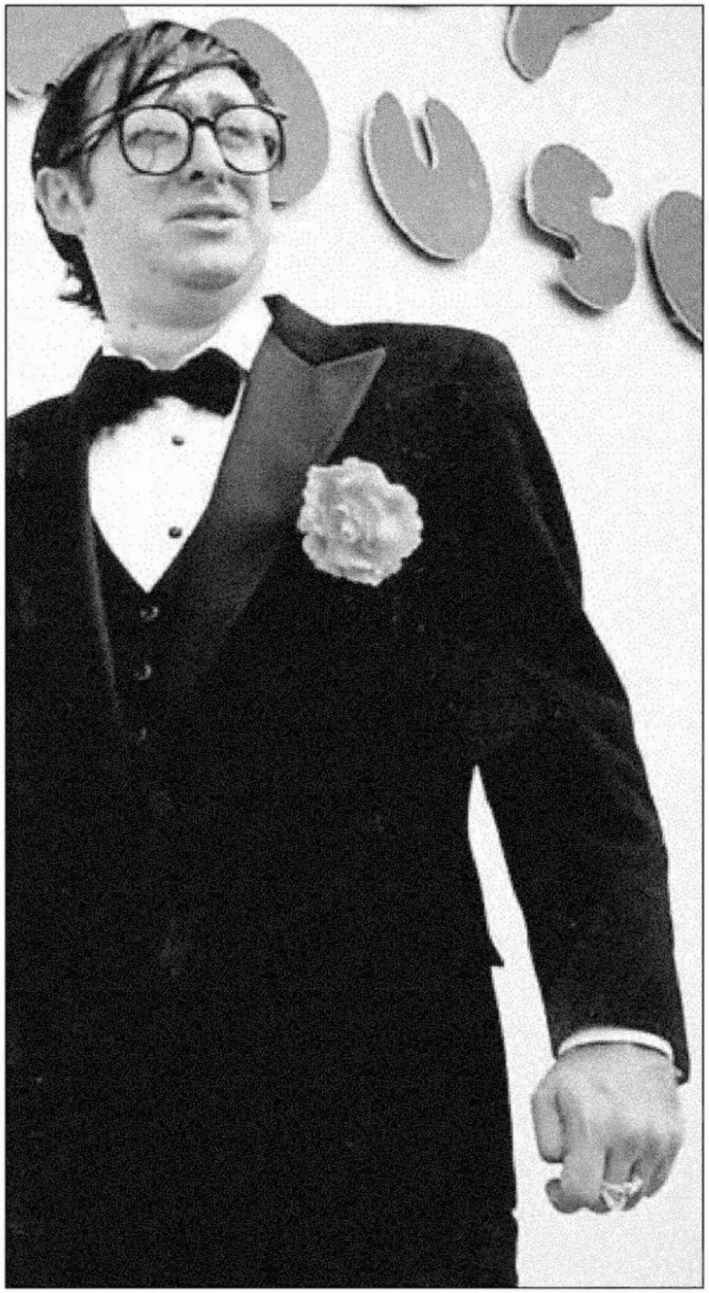
Sun: Not all your jokes get big laughs, though. Some of them are met with awkward silences.

Hamburger: You know, some people are hard of hearing, and some of the sound systems where I've performed, the rock 'n' roll bands blow the speakers out. So certain tones of the human voice are inaudible. When they can't hear it, they don't laugh, but if they can hear it, there's no doubt they really will laugh. I've been doing this for so many years I would never bring my Z-grade material to the stage. Strictly A- through M-grade material.

From The Globe and Mail — October 08, 2004

going out

COMEDY
NEIL HAMBURGER



LIZZY KATE GRAY

BY BRAD WHEELER

Neil Hamburger is what you might call a conceptual comedian. His concept? He's not funny. Such a failing would normally present a world of problems for a standup comic, yet Hamburger thrives, working his anti-shtick with great industry. "Three hundred and sixty-six shows a year," the sad-sack jokester claims, speaking over the phone from Chino, Calif., where he's scheduled to play a pizza parlour. "A lot of the top comedians — you get your guys like Carrot Top and that sort of thing — they can pick and choose. But in my position, we accept every show that's offered."

As heard on his most recent CD, *Laugh out Lord*, Hamburger's jokes fall as flat as those pizza pies. The material is sub-par and drably delivered, his monologues damaged by habitual throat-clearing and a tendency to sigh after each non-joke. Audience members seem to pay him no mind.

Critics are paying attention, though, and are united in their lack of praise. But for an underground comedian, the poor press works to attract fans, not deter them. "Maybe they enjoyed hitting themselves in the knee with a hammer," Hamburger says, referring to his fan base. "I don't know why you would go to something that's getting bad reviews."

Hamburger, self-dubbed America's Funnyman, describes a typical audience member at his shows as young and angry. "They seem to have been dropped into the club from the air. I don't know why they're there and they don't know why I'm there. It's like a lion encountering a tiger."

There is a school of thought that believes Hamburger to be some sort of ruse, that his persona is fictitious. The possibility exists that Hamburger is actually Gregg Turkington, a known hoax-puller who is listed as producer on Hamburger's various albums. It is all so reminiscent of Tony Clifton, Andy Kaufman's boorish lounge-performer character.

"This is a thing that comes up all the time," Hamburger says, deftly deflecting the speculation. "We hear this constantly, about Andy Kaufman. I would like to see his act. I check the paper, and he's never playing. I try to keep up with the new comedians and see what they're up to."

In the mind of Hamburger, a performer who dies every night on stage, Andy Kaufman still lives. America's Funnyman fails to be funny. Irony isn't dead — it's not even ailing.

Neil Hamburger performs at the El Mocambo on Oct. 14 (9 p.m. $10. 464 Spadina Ave., 416-870-8000) and Hamilton's Underground on Oct. 17.

Why did God invent Alan Alda? He needed a way to transport Golden Globe Awards into hell.

A semi-funny line from a mostly unfunny comic (but that's the point)

He's not quite a ventriloquist, but "America's Funnyman" Neil Hamburger, who is also performing at the show, does wear a pretty tattered tuxedo.

"I say things you're not supposed

y) category has now lost
d problem to have."

TERNATIVE COMEDY SHOW

to say, but he takes things further," says Kindler, of the often-inebriated Hamburger, also known as "the world's 'worst' standup comedian."

Between Kindler and Hamburger, the anti-joke alter ego of comedian and musician Gregg Turkington, it's a mutual admiration society.

"Andy Kindler is really one of the greats," says Hamburger, clearing his throat twice. "Why is that man not a multibillionaire? Instead, you get these slobs like Dane Cook and some of these other slobs out there telling these jokes. Carrot Top is another one making millions and millions of dollars.

"Andy should be very, very rich. He tells it like it is. If Abbott and Costello had genital warts, he would say it. That's not the truth and he would never say it," says Hamburger. "I'm just giving an example."

As for his own set, the phlegmy comedian, who hosted Poolside Chats on Tom Green's Internet talk show, promises to live up to his audience's expectations.

"Jokes. That's what the crowd is paying for, a joke. And that's what I try to do with my set, especially because I'm always in danger of being removed from the stage and put into some kind of holding pen.

"I'm going to try to tell as many jokes as I can as quickly as I can, to give these people their money's worth," says Hamburger. "I'll try to get 30 jokes out in 7½ minutes. That's bringing the bang back into show business."

From Waterloo Region Record — October 12, 2006

The sad clown

By Jason Schneider
For NightLife

"Is this a crank call?"

It's not easy being Neil Hamburger, the great misunderstood comic genius, and I reassure him that my intentions are indeed to have a serious conversation about his current activities.

But despite his recent upgrade from being known as America's Funnyman to The World's Funnyman — also the title of his new DVD, taped in Sydney, Australia — Hamburger remains as tragic a figure as ever. Truly, a Sad Clown.

"The venues have honestly improved as my fame has been spreading, but we're still not to the point where there's any payment being made to me," he says.

"I do feel like I've turned a corner though, and that some of this debt that's been killing me could be paid off in seven or eight years. Just last Monday I performed at a pizza parlour in Yuma, Arizona for 17 people, which was a big improvement from the last time I was there."

Hamburger certainly has come a long way in his decade-long career, and makes no apologies for doing whatever he's had to do in order to succeed. Referring to the new DVD, he explains, "The title was really a loophole we found. No one had claimed the name, The World's Funnyman, so sometimes you just have to grab things when you can. But having an international audience now does help out the prospect of becoming immortal. I've been very sick lately, and nothing seems to be helping. I'm very concerned about having to pay off my debts after I'm dead."

As a leader of the resurgence in popularity of comedy recordings, Hamburger is not surprisingly bitter at the widespread success that other standups have enjoyed on the charts recently.

"I've done eight or nine albums, and some of these guys come in with their first album and steal my thunder," he says.

"Like this Dane Cook guy sells millions and wins a Grammy, and he's not very funny. I'm still in triple digits with some of my records, and I did 399 shows last year. It's just not fair. The man has probably slept with my ex-wife on top of that."

However, Hamburger has been exploring new avenues through his Internet talk show that can be found on Tom Green's website. "It's called Poolside Chats with Neil Hamburger, and we get whoever we can to come on and talk to me, as well as take calls from the audience. It's all filmed at Tom's house. I just talked to Brooke Shields the other day, so to me this feels like a mark of success in some way, even though most of the callers just say, 'Screw you, Neil Hamburger,' and hang up."

He may be making more friends in Hollywood, but Hamburger's life is still primarily on the road. He has grown particularly fond of Waterloo, as his latest gig marks his third appearance at the Starlight. "It's got a nice loungey atmosphere, that could be Vegas for all I know. It sure beats standing on top of a box in a pizza parlour in Yuma, Arizona."

But does he change his act at all when he's in Canada, given the opportunity to speak freely about current affairs? "I try to stay away from political jokes because it always offends half the audience. We get a lot of the crazies, stoned out of their minds on LSD, so one day they love the president, and the next day they hate him. I still have lots of good jokes about Jimmy Carter that I do, but the younger people don't really get them. I may have to update my routine, but you never want to retire material that's always worked for you."

LIVE • NEIL HAMBURGER • OCT. 12 • STARLIGHT CLUB, WATERLOO • $11 • 9 P.M. • 519-885-4970

From The Ottawa Citizen — October 14, 2004

HAMBURGER SERVES RAW COMEDY

FATEEMA SAYANI
NIGHTLIFE

PHOTO BY LIZZY KATE GREY

Neil Hamburger inspires loyalty from a cult-like following that finds his half-cocked attempts at being funny just hilarious.

His delivery is flat and deadpan, he is constantly picking on himself and sometimes his jokes just make you wonder if you missed the punch line. Yet Neil Hamburger seems to inspire loyalty and devotion from a cult-like following that finds his half-cocked attempts at being funny just hilarious.

His humour is in being strange, dowdy and willing to be laughed at more than his jokes: "Why did Madonna feed her infant dog food?" "Because that's what came out of her breasts."

It's juvenile, nonsensical and not even clever, but when it's delivered in that sly murmur, you almost have to laugh for the character Hamburger projects, a character he always refers to as the royal "we."

He came to comedy, he says, after he "failed in the fast-food industry.

"I was let go after a disappointing run as a fry cook. Job counsellors said comedy was the next step down on the totem pole and it certainly does pay less than they promised."

People who attend his shows don't often know when to laugh or what to laugh at, particularly when he delivers groaners like the Madonna line.

"Sometimes people want these jokes and then I tell them and they realize they don't want them," he says in response. "But you always end up despondent by the end of the night. Hopefully we can keep the faith alive, we want tears of laughter."

His shtick may seem a little dumb, but you actually have to be rather bright to appreciate him. His talent shines in his commentary, but he bombs when he actually tries to tell a joke.

"He creates ... a really uncomfortable vibe, and I think it's hilarious," says Mike Hickey, the front man for electronic-art-rock act Daiquiri, and the guy who most often books Hamburger in Ottawa.

"I don't know if there is anything to get, I just find his jokes hilarious."

Neil Hamburger, Daiquiri, DJ Booth, DJ Craig and Chameleonic spin for punk promoter Shawn Scallen's 30th birthday bash at Barrymore's (323 Bank St.) tomorrow at 9 p.m. $10.

GOING GREENFIELD

Greenfield Main's new album, *Barnburners and Heartchurners*, is precisely that: tales that come pouring out from the chest and could rip apart the porch from which they sound like they were written.

GM front man and Kelp Records honcho-in-training Jon Bartlett, still a fan of old-time country rock and a follower of Gram Parsons, thought some of the old stuff was sounding too sappy. "This one definitely has a little more rock 'n' roll injected than before."

He also covers a Buck Owens tune — *I'll Take a Chance* — with Casey Comeau.

Greenfield Main, the John Henrys and the Flaps play the Dominion Tavern (33 York St.) Saturday at 9 p.m. $8.

BRAND NEW KEPLER

Indie rock stars Kepler play a rare Ottawa show to test out the works on *Attic Songs*, their forthcoming release on Troubleman Unlimited. Their lineup had been Samir Khan, Jeremy Gara and Jon Georgekish-Watt for years, but with Gara taking on new duties as the drummer for Arcade Fire, co-ordinating tour schedules becomes a new nightmare. Check out the new lineup.

Kepler, Decibully and the Soiree play Maverick's (221 Rideau St.) Saturday at 9 p.m. $10.

GUITARS ON FIRE

Dark yet endearing, rock trio Mclusky first carved out a spot for itself playing blistering two-minute tracks with snarky, smart lyrics. The Cardiff, Wales, trio keep it up on their latest, *The Difference Between Me and You is That I'm Not on Fire*, expanding their subtle assault to four-minute tracks.

Mclusky and the Banditas play at Zaphod's (27 York St.) tonight at 9 p.m. $12.

READ 'EM AND BEEP

The Perpetual Motion Roadshow tours that have been passing through Canada almost every month offer up a taste of underground culture, bringing North American writers and literary artists to various cities to read and react with the locals. This round brings to Ottawa Todd Taylor, author and *Razorcake* fanzine publisher; online diarist and writer Jonathan Messinger; and Darren O'Donnell, author of *Your Secrets Sleep With Me* and a performance artist who likes to engage an audience. Free and fun.

The Perpetual Motion Roadshow with Todd Taylor, Jonathan Messinger, Darren O'Donnell at The Study Lounge inside the Embassy Hotel (25 Cartier St.) tomorrow at 8:30 p.m. Free admission.

KMFDM DOING IT AGAIN

KMFDM celebrates 20 years since they debuted. The industrial beat rock group, currently on Sanctuary Records, were there alongside bands like Ministry and Skinny Puppy, but not really breaking any critical barriers (that's where Nine Inch Nails came in). KMFDM and DJ Accurack at Barrymore's Monday at 9 p.m. $22 advance, $25 at the door.

SKATE SOUNDS

The PG-13s, For the Mathematics, Forty Cent Fix and Layiterslayit help to break in the Legacy Skatepark at 101 Centrepointe Dr. on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission is free.

THE PRE WHIRLWIND

Bluesy troubadour Kelly Joe Phelps, most often seen in these parts at Bluesfest, stops by the Black Sheep Inn. His new album, *Tape the Red Cane Whirlwind*, is due out in January.

Kelly Joe Phelps and Joe Grass at 753 Riverside Dr., Wakefield, on Saturday at 9 p.m. $20 advance.

GO ON AND SEE THEM

Chris Brown and Kate Fenner, one-time Bourbon Tabernacle Choir members and longtime activists, make a stop at Barrymore's in support of their new disc, *Go On*. Chris and Kate play Barrymore's Saturda at 9 p.m. $10 advance.

THE SIGHTS OF SEDUCTION

The Weapons of Mass Seduction celebrate the release of their album with the Sights, darlings of the Detroit garage scene at the Dominion Tavern tomorrow at 9 p.m. $10 advance, $12 at the door.

FATEEMA SAYANI can be reached at fateemasayani@hotmail.com

NEIL HAMBURGER

The King of Comedy

If comedians are indeed the new rock stars, then Neil Hamburger is Elvis, the Beatles and Wayne Newton combined. With his trusty manager Art Huckman in tow, Neil travels the country for as much as 350 days a year, spreading joy wherever he goes. Just listen to his debut comedy compact disc, the aptly-titled America's Funnyman, *for proof. Recorded live in Albuquerque, Modesto and Las Vegas, Neil skewers everything from doctors and lawyers, to factory outlet malls, motels, condoms and celebrity liver transplants. He may talk about depressing things like his divorce and his suicide attempts, but like a comedic Midas, his touch turns it all into gold. The compact disc includes his classic "X-Rated Hot Dog Vendor" bit (though, to be honest, the visual gig loses a little bit in the transition), and Neil even uses his patented "Zipper Shtick" to put a heckler in his place. Sure, some say Neil sounds like a flat, humorless Steve Martin without the banjo or the arrow through the head, but Neil's "That's my life!" is easily as catchy as "Excuuuse me!" Once you listen to* America's Funnyman, *you'll want to play it again and again to relive all the great comedic moments.*

Neil was kind enough to take time out of his busy touring schedule to answer a few questions for Caught In Flux. *Ladies and gentlemen, Neeeeeilllll Hamburrrrgerrrrr!!!!!!!!!*

How did you get your start in the comedy business?

Well, I did the open-mike nights for a long, long time...and then I was able to use the fact that I had played certain clubs, even if it was just an open-mike night, to get bookings in out-of-town clubs. I fudged the details a bit, but it worked. And with comedy, once you're in, you're in. Look how many movies Chevy Chase has made.

Growing up, who were your comedic idols? Why?

Well, aside from the obvious ones, like Ben Blue, the Ritz Brothers, Phil Silvers, Jonathan Winters, Rich Little, Gabe Kaplan...there was a barber I knew who used to tell the funniest jokes about human nature. He would also do things like accidentally cut your earlobe, that sort of thing. A real card.

Where was your first gig? What was it like?

My first hundred or so "gigs" weren't gigs at all, it was more a case of standing up and trying out a routine at a birthday party, or telling jokes to family, or whatever. My first paying gig was at a place called The Laugh Wharf which used to be in Torrance, California. I had an opening slot on a Monday night, and while I didn't get much in the way of laughs, it was a thrill to be up on that stage. I ended up eventually getting a regular slot there on Monday nights until the place was shut down by bill collectors. But it was a good place to work out my craft.

What is it like being on Drag City? Isn't the label, home to such obscure punk rockers as Palace and Red Krayola, a little small-time for you?

Small time, no. They are professionals. I've worked with a lot smaller, believe you me. We did a cassette of funny answering machine messages for a company in New Jersey; I didn't see a penny. They sold them at truck stops, I think. But Drag City...they're great kids. Very upbeat.

How do you work up your material?

Everything goes through my manager, Art Huckman. If he doesn't think it's funny, it doesn't go into the set. Well, that's not strictly true...sometimes he doesn't think it's funny but says I should go with it anyway, that maybe he just doesn't like it. But all the jokes are tested night after night across the country.

What comedy routines do you wish you'd written, if any?

I wish I'd written the one that I got sued over. Legally, I can't tell you which one it is, but there's a routine I was doing a few years back in my set that someone else claimed I had plagiarized from them. It wasn't true – I'd never even heard of the guy. But he won the suit, and officially, he wrote the routine.

What are your favorite cities to play? What cities do you never want to visit again?

I have kind of a soft spot for Modesto, as I've recorded a couple of records there. But the place I used to play there, a lounge at the Days Inn, got converted into a Mexican restaurant, so that gig is over. I have a regular thing going in Paso Robles, CA, which has been nice. But basically, I love all the cities I play. Great people everywhere. I would never rule out visiting any city. I hope we'll be playing your hometown soon!

From Caught In Flux zine number 6, Summer 1997

What are the toughest gigs you've ever played?
They're all tough, in one way or another. There was a Shakey's Pizza in Oklahoma, the name of the city escapes me right now...that one was a disaster because it was empty except for this one table of eight people celebrating a birthday party. Well, they didn't want a comedian, and they asked me to stop. But the manager of the Shakey's told me he wasn't going to pay unless I performed, so I continued on. There ended up being quite an altercation between these people, who were drunk, and myself. An explosion. But in all fairness, the Shakey's gig did have its good points. I don't want to harp on the bad points. It's been a great career.
I heard snippets from a motivational tape of yours on the radio. Will you be doing more?
Oh yes. That must have been for the Western Motivational Cassette Institute. I did a bunch of work for them last year. They still owe me a couple of payments, in fact. I'd love to do more of that kind of work, especially if I can get a few jokes in there. Any subject will do, but I would especially be interested in motivating people to live longer. After all, I don't want my audience going and dropping dead on me!
Are you often asked to speak at testimonial dinners or celebrity roasts?
No, I don't get asked too often. I spoke at a testimonial dinner for my manager, Art Huckman. He's been with me a couple years now. This was in Las Vegas last year, at the Continental. Some of Art's family and friends turned out, and we really did it up. Really hit the town. Art used to work with a lot of the greats in Hollywood. So we all had a lot of positive things to say. It wasn't a "roast" at all.
Does it get tiring being on the road so often? What do you do to have fun on tour?
It can be tiring, but that's my life! Seriously, though, yes, it can be tiring. I try to keep track of license plates. I look for out-of-state ones, and then try to memorize the number and see if I run across it again. We also like to stop at some of these tourist areas, rest stops...you know, just to say you've seen it. You don't want to just breeze past this stuff, this is a beautiful country.
Many comedians have gone onto successful TV careers. What would the Neil Hamburger TV show be like? Have you pitched such a show to the networks?
We did one better than that – we made it ourselves! We filmed an hour-long show for syndication. And if I do say so myself, it was terrific. Art really pulled out the stops and got some top B-level names to appear, and we had some great skits. It was a real variety show, and I was featured doing routines and then acting in the comedy skits. Unfortunately, the company hired to make the masters for the stations went bankrupt. Since they were in Taiwan, we couldn't easily get our master tape back from them, and the bank there seized it and then sold it in an auction to a Korean company who then aired the show in South Korea and India, I believe. We tried to get our attorneys to get the tape back, or at least collect royalties on the airings, but it was impossible to get anywhere with this Korean company, they never returned any phone calls. We are going to try to piece together a new edit using outtakes, but it may be impossible. And there's no budget left to refilm it, since the company that funded it in the first place, Laffinglife Productions in Burbank, they've fallen on hard times as well. Planet Pimp Records was going to do the soundtrack, but we have to rerecord a lot of it now, or locate the tapes.
Have you been approached about commercials or endorsements? What product or service would Neil Hamburger most like to endorse?
I've done some things here and there, but the contracts have run out so I'm not going to give them more publicity in this interview. But it was small time stuff, local stuff. You probably wouldn't know these products anyway. I would like to do some motel chain endorsements. Motel 6, Super 8, any of those. Best Western. I've stayed in them all, and I have some definite opinions.
What would be the pinnacle of success for Neil Hamburger?
I would like to play New York City. If you can make it there... you know the line. I haven't been able to get booked, though. Right now, we're just doing the smaller towns. So many pizza parlors lately. Maybe this interview will help. I would like to do another TV special, and have it be a success. I got a couple of letters from India after the show aired illegally there, so I know people liked the show. But I would like to do one that wouldn't get mired in bankruptcies, and that would actually be seen!
Who are your favorite singers/groups?
I like whatever's on the radio, except for some of the shock-rockers. I like a lot of country and western, Kenny Rogers, Lionel Richie, those sorts of things. And some of the old vaudeville tunes are great. Musicals. I just saw *Grease 2* on TV. Anything, really. Anything distracting. It just has to be distracting. That's just my taste.
Of today's crop of comedians, who are your favorites?
I like all of them. They're all great. So much talent out there. It's just amazing. They're all such big influences on what I do, they're nearly interchangeable.
What is the Neil Hamburger philosophy of life?
Oh. Well, you know, to make people laugh. That's the big thing. Laughter is the best medicine. Bartender, the laugh's on me. I think there's a lot of trouble in this whole wide world. I know my ex-wife has thrown a lot my way. I hope I can get people's mind off all their troubles. Sometimes in order to get them to cheer up, I have to take on their burdens as my own – it's like passing a torch except instead of fire, they're passing on hostility. But that's entertainment. And that's my life.

Neil's comedy compact disc, America's Funnyman, *is out on Drag City Records (PO Box 476867, Chicago, IL 60647). Write to the Neil Hamburger Fan Club at P.O. Box 15927, Santa Fe, NM 87506.*

From Folio Weekly — February 22-28, 2011

The many faces of mirthful madness: Comedian Neil Hamburger.

Uncle Meat

Comedian Neil Hamburger suffers for his art so you don't have to!

NEIL HAMBURGER with JP INC., PATRICK STEEN
Friday, Feb. 25 at 8 p.m.
Jack Rabbits, 1528 Hendricks Ave., Jacksonville
Tickets are $8
398-7496

The stereotype of the tortured artist is nearly as old as the act of artistic creation. One wonders if, after that first Neanderthal draftsman carved out his initial cave scribblings, the hirsute bug-eater wasn't suddenly overcome with a soul-crushing sense of worthlessness. For better or worse, the idea that art is suffering is a cliché that rests somewhere between enduring a shitty childhood, wearing a beret and, let's face it, emitting some knee-buckling halitosis. Even a cursory glance reveals a roll call of artistic martyrdom: Van Gogh cut off his ear and offed himself, Sylvia Plath chose death via Easy Bake oven, Toulouse-Lautrec was an unwitting participant in many a Montmarte Midget Toss and comedian Neil Hamburger must travel the grueling circuit of the contemporary comedian.

Since the early '90s, Hamburger has released more than a dozen comedy albums, performed on "Jimmy Kimmel Live," FOX News' "Red Eye" and on Tom Green's late night shows, and opened for many celebrity-rockers-turned-fans, including Tenacious D, Melvins, A Perfect Circle and Iron & Wine. The brainchild and alter ego of 44-year-old punk-rocker Gregg Turkington, Neil Hamburger takes on everything from Princess Diana to Red Hot Chili Peppers, all delivered with a throat-clearing punctuation (seemingly to "block out" the many hecklers). The sad-sack funnyman sports a tuxedo and greasy comb-over, while clutching an ever-present cocktail. Though comparisons could be drawn to the late Andy Kaufman and his vulgar alter ego, Tony Clifton, it's pretty safe to say Clifton never delivered this typical Hamburger zinger: "Why did Michael Jackson hang his infant son from a balcony? Because he wouldn't finish his saucer of human sperm." Ba-doom!

When Folio Weekly contacted Hamburger's current record label, Drag City, about a phone interview, we were given only one ground rule: Do not mention Turkington. Honoring that promise, here are some highlights of our 45-minute talk.

Folio Weekly: What's a typical day on the road for Neil Hamburger?
Neil Hamburger: Typically we drive around 700 miles a day so there's a lot of time for the mind to wander. And that's not a good thing. And then you get to the show, usually very tired, demoralized and hungry. So then you get on stage and my job is to forget the problems that I have and concentrate on relieving everyone else's problems by telling some jokes. Because let's face it, everyone's got a lot of problems these days with the disease and the unemployment and just being overall miserable — some of them with personality disorders.

> **"We did stay in a real dump of a hotel out there by where the Lynyrd Skynyrd guy was buried. Which is too bad. You'd like to think that if you've given the world so much music that you would at least be buried near a Courtyard by Marriott or something like that."**

F.W.: You're well-connected in Hollywood. Do you have any inside celebrity gossip to share?
N.H.: Well, I can tell you that they're all dirtbags. These people are vermin.

F.W.: Why do you think that is? Could being a dirtbag be the first vow of Scientology?
N.H.: Well, I think that's half of it but I don't want to get your newspaper shut down by saying it.

F.W.: Why do you think America is obsessed with older women, i.e., MILFS, Cougars and Mama Grizzlies?
N.H.: I think it's because we are all getting older ourselves. Everyone is going down the goddamned drain — quickly.

F.W.: Lady Gaga announced she's developing her new signature perfume that will smell of blood and semen. What would your signature cologne smell like?
N.H.: Probably tonic water. Quinine.

F.W.: Neil, do you have any spiritual beliefs?
N.H.: Well, I did. And then all of these horrible things started to happen and it's hard to maintain your faith when one shitty thing after another happens. That's when you give it up.

F.W.: Have you ever considered yoga?
N.H.: I don't think I can afford that. That's more expensive than Scientology.

F.W.: Do you have any fond memories of performing here in Jacksonville?
N.H.: We've had a great couple of times performing there. The last time we were there, they had a couple bottles of champagne waiting for us and that's the first time that ever happened and it will probably never happen again. We did stay in a real dump of a hotel out there by where the Lynyrd Skynyrd guy was buried. Which is too bad. You'd like to think that if you've given the world so much music that you would at least be buried near a Courtyard by Marriott or something like that. □

Dan Brown
dbrown@folioweekly.com

From The Forum — October 16, 2003

Neil Hamburger needs a helping hand

By John Lamb
jlamb@forumcomm.com

Comedians live or die in front of audiences.

Neil Hamburger makes a living dying in front of his audiences.

That doesn't mean the unfunny comic's show at Ralph's Corner tonight won't have the crowd rolling.

In an Andy Kaufman-esque twist, Hamburger's pathetic failure to get a laugh has earned him a cult following and modest success. Pretty good for a guy who can't catch a break.

"If you define success sort of loosely as someone working non-stop and has a sort of empty feeling in the pit of their stomach. If that's a success than yes, I'm a success," Hamburger says. "If you're talking about financial or any other sort of success, I'd say we're still aiming towards that currently and we've got a little ways to go."

If you go

- **Who:** Neil Hamburger, Pleaseasaur and The Joggers
- **When:** 10 p.m. today
- **Where:** Ralph's Corner, Moorhead
- **Info:** There is a $6 cover for this 21 and older show. (218) 233-3351
- **Online:** Hear a portion of reporter John Lamb's interview with Neil Hamburger at www.in-forum.com

The comedian is interrupted by a click and silence before his voice returns.

"And that's part of the problem there. The phone cuts out and the audience laughter cuts out and the whole thing falls apart. It's like a house of cards."

Hamburger first appeared on "Great Phone Calls," a collection of pranks credited to Amarillo Records head Greg Turkington. But if Turkington is the man behind Hamburger, he doesn't break character.

On the phone from LaVerne, Calif. – "not one of the hot spots in the United States" – Hamburger blames his financial insecurity on a failed marriage and a former manager, but never on the material or himself.

In a rumpled black tuxedo, saucer-sized glasses and greasy, matted down hair, he strives for the classic Catskills comedian image. However, his Sad Sack appearance gets more laughs than his inept jokes.

The comic baits crowds with juicy lead-ins, only to deliver limp punch lines. They're the kinds of jokes little kids tell, laughing hysterically, except Hamburger serves them up to an unresponsive crowd with a distressed sigh.

"How many Spice Girls does it take to screw in a light bulb?" he teases on his concert album,

HAMBURGER: Page B3

For now, sharp-dressed man Neil Hamburger is on the outside looking in. Tonight's show at Ralph's Corner and a second appearance on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" Nov. 4 could signal a change in the comedian's fortunes.

Special to The Forum

HAMBURGER: Stand-up comic is master of 'anti-humor'

From Page B1

"Left for Dead in Malaysia." "Well, it was five, now it's four and I'm sure any day now it will be down to three."

"His timing is painful, his delivery is labored, and his jokes aren't jokes, but that's the whole idea," raved The Onion's review of 1998's "Raw Hamburger." "It's anti-humor, the brilliant, insightful form of comedy currently practiced by only the most daring, and among stand-up comics by few other than Hamburger."

His four live albums and a handful of EPs and singles paint an excruciatingly vivid picture of what it's like to bomb onstage. He fights for the audience's attention with hecklers, his own manager and a popcorn machine.

His circuit consists of pizza parlors, weddings and bachelor parties.

"You know the secondary markets? We're hitting one step below that."

Still, his stock is on the rise. GQ singled him out as one of their favorite nerd comics and he's slated for a return appearance on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" on Nov. 4.

He spent the summer on tour with "some of these groups that are burning up the charts."

That's another Hamburger pickle. The bands, Tenacious D and Mr. Bungle (who Turkington used to manage), have followings, but are hardly topping charts.

"Of course the response didn't match the size of the stadium," Hamburger says. "By that I mean when you have 50,000 kids there and only six of them are laughing, it can be the loneliest feeling in the world."

He shares that lonely feeling with fans on a just-released DVD "The Show Must Go Off: Neil Hamburger Live at the Phoenix Greyhound."

"We've got an alternate track with amplified laugh applause, because, you know, these dog tracks, some of the people are there more to bet on the dogs than to let a comedian help them laugh," Hamburger explains.

He's also hoping to sell his life story to Hollywood, but insists he play the lead instead of established actors to retain the paycheck. Asked who would play the female love interest, he mulls it over before suggesting Phoebe Cates or Tippi Hedren.

For now he keeps working the club circuit. Moorhead's show is followed by dates in Minneapolis and Milwaukee, but a return to the Phoenix Greyhound Park was canceled.

Asked about the possibility of doing USO shows, Hamburger lights up like a grill.

"I'd love something like that because you have a captive audience there that can't leave because they'd get court martialed. Of course that was the key to Bob Hope's success," he says. "Those guys may be the only ones who have it tougher than I do."

Readers can reach Forum reporter John Lamb at (701) 241-5533

From The Toronto Star — August 26, 2007

STAND-UP

His comb-over is worse than his bite

BRUCE DEMARA
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

It's got to be the worst comb-over in showbiz.

Add to that a trademark tuxedo (black or ruby red), owlish glasses, marbles-in-the-mouth voice and dirty mind and you've got Neil Hamburger, a comic misanthrope ideally suited for cynical times.

Hamburger — a.k.a. Gregg Turkington — returns to the El Mocambo on Friday in what he vows will be a "very popular sort of event.

"You'll have a lot of — shall we say — transactions going on, sexual transactions after the show. We tend to attract a lot of folks who are looking to perhaps have children or at least, you know, practise having children," Hamburger said, in a recent telephone interview.

With a slew of DVD records and live show recordings to his credit, the long-time stand-up comedian's career has gotten a recent boost from Canadian comic Tom Green's internet channel, TomGreen.com, on which Hamburger presides over the Web talk show *Poolside Chats*.

But Hamburger wonders plaintively how long it will take to return to the cyberwaves. "We're waiting for the new season to start on *Poolside Chats*. Internet television seasons are very different than the regular television seasons. I think you have to wait until there's a leap year or maybe a Friday the 13th or something like that to get the season kicking," Hamburger said.

Comedian Neil Hamburger.

So, Hamburger continues his tour of the "Los Angeles area" before heading to Toronto. "By Los Angeles area, I mean a pizza parlour 207 miles outside of Los Angeles."

On touring, he reflects, "It is just what I do. At this point, there's no joy left, you know. Does a plumber enjoy scraping the bowel movements out of the inside of the pipes, you know, to free up the water?"

Still, Hamburger noted, there are "some small pleasures to be had."

"For instance, we did a show last night in Paso Robles, California, and I was given a pitcher of water afterwards. It was such a victory to get something like that. To have a place treat you with such respect, that's when you really know that things are really on an upswing," he said with mock seriousness.

With Britney Spears, Michael Jackson and Princess Di being part fodder for his act, Hamburger noted "you do have to keep current to get the new jokes out there, you know, and follow important issues that affect the world's people," citing the Spice Girls' upcoming reunion as comic gold.

"We have the odd George Bush joke but a lot of kids now, they don't even want to hear the name. It's gone beyond something they can laugh at.

"(But) Bush should get more credit than he's given. He's the first man to figure out a way to slow down time. It does seem like he's been there forever and he's going to be there forevermore. For those who are worried about their own mortality, it's wonderful to see a man who can take one year and make it seem like three."

OMAHA WORLD-HERALD GO

'Anti-comic' makes people very nervous

By Niz Proskocil
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Comedians are supposed to be funny, right?

Not if you're an "anti-comic." The jokes are bad, the timing off, the silences awkward. And that, to some people, makes for a side-splitting routine.

Los Angeles-based Neil Hamburger, one of the country's most widely known anti-comics, performs Monday at O'Leaver's Pub as part of a Midwest mini tour.

As one local Hamburger fan put it: "It's just the irony of him not being funny, and being a comedian, that makes his performance funny."

Hamburger (real name Gregg Turkington) is touring in support of his sixth full-length comedy album, "Great Moments at Di Presa's Pizza House." Like his other albums, it was released on Chicago indie-rock label Drag City.

We caught up with "America's funnyman" in an interview via e-mail.

Q. Will this be your first time in Omaha? What can fans can expect at the show?

A. I have performed hundreds of shows worldwide, including shows in every state in Australia (including Tasmania) and most of the states in our own great nation. Yet somehow Nebraska has always eluded me, until now. I am very excited and more than a little nervous. I would say that fans should expect a sincere attempt to brighten their evening with curse-laden, R-rated laughs.

Q. Do you typically perform at rock clubs?

A. I used to work strictly on the Mon-

Neil Hamburger

Who: Comedy and music, also featuring Daiquiri and The Show Is the Rainbow

When: 9:30 p.m. Monday

Where: O'Leaver's Pub, 1322 S. Saddle Creek Road

How much: $5

Information: www.onepercentproductions.com

day-night-pizza-parlor circuit, but when that dried up, I made the move into the rock 'n' roll nightclub scene. It's a good match. The heavy alcohol intake at rock clubs ensures that the audience will be abnormally giddy from the get-go.

Q. For someone who's referred to as an "anti-comic," you're pretty darn funny.

A. That is strictly a marketing gimmick. I am an honest-to-goodness, hard-working comic, and I have the broken spirit, frayed nerves, financial ruin and shattered emotional state to prove it.

Q. How did the name Neil Hamburger come about?

A. It's a stage name, obviously. My birth name was Neil Doublebaconcheeseburger, but with all the negative press that cholesterol has received in recent years, it made sense to shorten it. Strictly a career move.

From Quad-City Times — June 08, 2006

Comedian Neil Hamburger shares his beefs

By Sean Moeller
GO! Writer

It's a rough life for Neil Hamburger, a comedian famous for his on-stage throat-clearing, crass jokes about pop culture celebrities and a penchant for talking about feces.

Hamburger woke up having slept wrong on his right hand, the result of a poor night of fictitious cot slumber. Then, as luck would have it, the highway was unkind to the tour van and a tire blew somewhere in California.

"We're at a gas station," said Hamburger, who rarely takes himself out of character, but when he does, goes by the name Gregg Turkington. "I should have known better. This is an area I know very well. There's a farmer nearby who throws carpet tacks out on the highway.

"It's too bad because now I have to spend my lunch money for the next 10 days to have this tire fixed."

Even if Hamburger had that lunch money back in his pocket, he insists that the eating's not been good. This act, which he takes to greyhound dog race tracks and pizza parlors (mostly just rock 'n' roll clubs), has had to scrounge to keep ticking and moving through the country. What are worse are the profitable entertainment acts that Hamburger considers deficient to his own. All of these acts that Hamburger finds to be sub-par draw the brunt of jokes, something he finds his public wants.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Neil Hamburger, whose comedy tour is playing mainly pizza places and rock clubs, performs at Gabe's Oasis, Iowa City, Sunday.

"These people at these rock clubs tend to laugh more than the people in the pizza parlors. I think it's because they're all souped up on God knows what and they're out to have sexual relations with others and that sort of thing.

"They laugh hysterically and some people, I'm told, are still laughing an hour after I've left, scratching at the walls. The people at pizza places are just there to eat pizza," Hamburger said. "How can these people not (appreciate jokes about pop celebrities)? These are people who aren't always satisfied with the popular culture of today and we cater to that. A lot of these people in entertainment are making good money for putting on a poor show.

"I make poor money for putting on a slightly above poor show when I could be making average money putting on an average show.

"You know that movie 'Garfield: The Movie?' That movie made a whole busload of millionaires, but if you ask any given kid on the street, they'll tell you, 'I threw up during that movie.'

"People have been known to pass away during that movie. Parents think that their kids will like this movie and they're wrong."

The poor money he's making on the live shows and compact discs that he's put out on Chicago indie Drag City (he's also got a new concert movie — formerly entitled "That's Not Gold, That's Dung" but now set to be called "The World's Funnyman" — set for an August release) isn't going to his diet budget.

"You know what I had for dinner last night?" Hamburger asks, not really expecting an answer, but posing it as a form of one of his zingers.

"Paint from those paint balls. A guy said that it was non-toxic. I had a sip."

And the source of jokes like "What do you get when you cross Sir Elton John with a saber-tooth tiger?" and "Why did God invent Paris Hilton?" — all with punchlines full of filthiness and hilariously questionable taste — is USA Today.

"You have to read USA Today. It's all there as far as world news goes and a lot of times you can get these for free in hotels. I don't usually stay in these hotels, but I might sneak a shower in a sink and maybe have a pastry," he said. "I've been doing this so long, I have a lot of jokes. You can take a Frankie Goes To Hollywood joke, tweak it a little and you've got a new Blink-182 joke."

Sean Moeller can be contacted at (563) 383-2288 or smoeller@qctimes.com.

if you go

Who: Neil Hamburger with Daiquiri
When: 9 p.m. Sunday, May 11
Where: Gabe's Oasis, 330 E. Washington St., Iowa City
How much: $8
Information: (319) 354-4788

DINING GUIDE
Casual Dining
Come Dine
G's Riverfront Cafe
102 S. Main, Port Byron, IL • 309-523-2781
KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

From The Boston Globe — July 19, 2003

Sending up stand-up with an abstract touch

By Nick A. Zaino III
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Comedy Notes

It is tempting to think of Neil Hamburger as a fictional character, an anti-comic in the tradition of Andy Kaufman. Hamburger, who plays T.T. the Bear's tonight, depends as much on uncomfortable silence as laughter to make his routine work.

He delivers one-liners that follow the normal constructs of observational humor (laundry detergent, fast food, "7-Elevens are all the same"), but wind up trailing off with no real punchline. His musings on his personal life — including his divorce, his falling-out with his manager, and the fact he lives out of a storage locker — never find that silver lining or sardonic understanding that makes confessional humor funny. And each stinging shot he takes at himself is capped with his catch phrase, "But that's my life!" The effect is a hilarious and near-perfect satire of stand-up comedy at its worst, along with some mind-bending abstract humor tossed in.

If Neil Hamburger is a comic front, no one is giving up his offstage identity, least of all Hamburger. He has no comment on reports that he is, in fact, musician and producer Gregg Turkington (the spokeswoman at his record label says she knows Hamburger but not Turkington). And Hamburger stays in character in a phone interview from Bloomington, Ill., where he's on the road. Hamburger blames the clubs and journalists for any rumors he's not a real person.

"They can say I parachuted from Mars to be on the stage, and if that'll bring a few more people in and sell a few more drinks, more power to them," he says. "And if we get a few people laughing and lift their burdens for a few moments so they might enjoy their lives, that's wonderful."

Audiences on his records, including his latest, "Laugh Out Lord," tend to be sparse, and heckle frequently. He says he tours so much and makes so little money that he doesn't have a home, and that the contents of his storage locker in Laverne, Calif., have been seized.

Still, Hamburger has become enough of a cult figure since the release of his "America's Funnyman" album in 1996 to have landed a spot on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" in May. And his work ethic and offbeat style have gained him a following among musicians such as Jon Wurster, drummer for the indie rockers Superchunk, who are more than willing to buy into Hamburger's onstage persona.

"I think people love Neil because everybody loves the underdog," Wurster says.

"This guy has had a lot of rough times — divorce, freak injuries, muggings — but he keeps on doing it. His touring schedule would make [prolific rocker] Mike Watt feel like a wimp. The man is a machine."

But Hamburger hates the idea of underdog appeal. "You never want to do that," he says. "When your career is down the toilet and your personal life is the pits and you're physically uncomfortable and the jokes don't get any response, the last thing you want to do is be self-deprecating."

Hamburger has been doing comedy for 15 years but admits he has been saying that for a few years now. The details are hazy, but he remembers starting comedy sometime in the Reagan administration as part of a therapy program at an open-mike night at the Laff Wharf in Hermosa Beach, Calif. As far as he knows, he's the only one from his therapy group who stuck with stand-up comedy.

Now Hamburger is just looking for enough paying gigs to keep him going. He says he'd love to find that million-dollar gig, but he would settle for less. A lot less.

"We're just hoping that things get better quickly," he says. "Both the audience response and the personal problems."

Comic Neil Hamburger, who performs at T.T. the Bear's Place tonight, undermines the conventions of confessional humor.

A slew of stand-up DVDs

Dane Cook releases a CD/DVD package Tuesday on Comedy Central Records, part of a glut of stand-up DVDs that includes specials from Wanda Sykes, Kevin James, and David Alan Grier. Cook's package, called "Harmful If Swallowed," is the Arlington native's first CD and his first DVD.

Around town

At the Comedy Connection tonight, Lewis Black plays two shows while Joey Kola performs one . . . Ira Proctor, Erin Judge, Dave Greenberg, Jan Davidson, and Joe Wong play the Comedy Studio tonight. . . . Train Wreck, a countrified Tenacious D side project starring Kyle Gass (who is partners in D with Jack Black), plays the Middle East on Monday.

"BAD BOYS II' IS WHAT SUMMER MOVIES ARE ALL ABOUT! IT'S BIGGER, BETTER AND BADDER!"
TOBY TOSCANO, TALKBIG PICTURES

From Arizona Daily Star — October 14, 2010

Like him or not, Hamburger is on a roll

By Adam Lehrer
FOR THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Zany stand-up comedian Neil Hamburger is described by some critics as "the world's worst comedian."

His routine consists of jokes aimed at celebrities and his ex-wife, usually starting with "Why did the chicken cross the road?" and putting his enemies in the punch line. He interrupts his gag material by constantly clearing his throat and acting vaguely strange and unsettling.

A British critic once described Hamburger as "a phlegm-filled sack of putrid self-loathing ... the perfect satire of a slick, professional nightclub comedian."

Hamburger is in reality a character created by musician and comedian Gregg Turkington, the Australian-born, Tempe-raised former musician who will perform at Club Congress on Friday.

Before he created Hamburger, Turkington played in various post punk bands. Hamburger was born out of a series of prank calls Turkington made in 1993. He recorded an album of the calls and decided the character was good enough to create a full-fledged comic persona.

IF YOU GO

- **What**: Comedian Neil Hamburger in concert, with JP Inc. opening.
- **When:** 10:30 p.m. Friday
- **Where**: Club Congress, 311 E. Congress St.
- **Tickets:** $5 in advance, $8 at door

In a phone interview last Friday, Turkington spoke in the character and persona of Hamburger — curmudgeonly with a nasally snarl and healthy amount of cursing.

Hamburger has spent the past 17 years touring around the country, including several stops at Club Congress.

"This is the fifth or sixth time I've done a show at Congress," Hamburger said. "There is the history there with the gunfights and the hobo who killed himself and still haunts the place. There's lots of space, lots of seats, nice drinks and even hotel rooms upstairs if you want to go and take a nap."

There are certainly people who don't understand the Neil Hamburger act, and he has been booed off stages before. He couldn't care less.

"It doesn't matter what idiots think of me," he growled. "If they want to leave, they can get out and go to some awful dance club."

But he's not flattered by the "world's worst comedian" label.

"I don't know how that remark keeps popping up," he said with a scowl. "You get these bitter writers, a--holes really. Clearly my act can't be the worst around — otherwise I wouldn't be headlining Hotel Congress."

More flattering reviews have often seen him compared to Tony Clifton, the character created by comedian Andy Kaufman. Hamburger dismisses the comparison as lazy journalism.

"I don't see the resemblance between Clifton and me," he said. "I saw the guy's show and it was enjoyable but very different. A lot of you journalists are alcoholics and drug-stoned. I mean, I had one who compared me to Mariah Carey, and honestly I thought that was more appropriate."

One thing people can always expect from a Hamburger show is his railing against various celebrities. He loathes many, dismissing them as horrible people. Among his targets: Paris Hilton, who he says is a horrible person with "a terrible body odor"; and Rage Against the Machine, which boycotted Arizona in response to SB 1070. Hamburger snidely remarks that fans should boycott the band because of its "lousy music."

The Neil Hamburger act is just as entertaining as it can be polarizing, and he urges everyone to come out and see for themselves.

"There is no better deal in town than my show," he said.

RUDE, CRUDE, FUNNY

ROBYN VON SWANK

Neil Hamburger, aka Gregg Turkington

Neil Hamburger brings odd humor to Tapp's

By CHLOE GOULD
Special to The State

Neil Hamburger never lacks hecklers when he performs. He has a greasy comb-over, oversized reading glasses and he usually wears a disheveled tuxedo. His jokes struggle for political correctness.

But he throws four-letter words right back at the crowd, one of the reasons why Hamburger has garnered a cult-like following in underground comedy. The man behind the glasses is musician Gregg Turkington, who has built his career around Hamburger's classless persona.

On Wednesday, Hamburger will perform at Tapp's Arts Center with comedians Todd Barry and Brendon Walsh in the first show of the trio's Summer Value Tour.

Before his stop in South Carolina – a "very green and very moist" state with "very nice plants," in Hamburger's words

SEE **HAMBURGER** PAGE **E3**

HAMBURGER

FROM PAGE **E1**

– the self-proclaimed hard-working and long-suffering comedian shared the intricacies behind his brand of comedy.

First, the hecklers.

"They're vermin that should be imprisoned," he said. "A lot of these people end up in jail because we travel with lawyers and things like that, and there are anti-heckling laws in many states."

He added he wasn't sure if there were anti-heckling laws in South Carolina (there aren't anti-heckling laws in any of the 50 states), but did warn of a heckler from DeKalb, Ill., who was imprisoned for yelling out punch lines ahead of time.

"He's serving a five-year sentence now for that one," Hamburger said.

No one is off limits in Hamburger's act. Paris Hilton and children with cancer are targets for crude and sometimes unfathomable jabs.

On his 2007 album "Hot February Night," which was recorded while he was on tour with Jack Black's band Tenacious D, Hamburger opened with this, uh, joke: "Why do so many children that have been diagnosed with cancer throw up their final meal before dying? Well, because they've been eating the food at Ronald McDonald House."

Did you laugh?

Hamburger has been in the business for 20 years, and he said that he's starting to have fans come up to him at shows with their children. (By the way, this is in no way a children's show.) According to Hamburger, the parents says, "Neil, we grew up listening to you. I had bad parents. They put me down in front of the record player and went off to do their drugs."

"That's the way society is," he continued, "we're happy to have those people around."

Hamburger knows he has longtime fans whom he considers the best in the world, but he thinks he's followed a dream too far.

"Sometimes people have a dream and they follow that dream. And sometimes it works for them, like these slobs on 'American Idol,'" Hamburger said. "I think there is more money to be made in chopping potatoes to make french-fried potatoes."

Hamburger's show at Tapp's Arts Center will include Barry, a New York comedian known for his work on Comedy Central, "Flight of the Concords" and "Adult Swim." And there's a funny story, fictional or not, about how the two met – in a line at Walgreens.

Hamburger was buying paper towels and candy bars. He can't remember what was in Barry's basket, but he knows there was a very, very long line. Everyone was stuck behind a "slob paying for their purchases with sticky pennies they were pulling out from their sock," Hamburger said.

The line was so deep that customers bonded, including Hamburger and Barry. And now the line reunites for a reunion every five years.

IF YOU GO

Neil Hamburger, Todd Barry and Brendon Walsh

When: Wednesday, 8 p.m.

Where: Tapp's Arts Center, 1644 Main St.

Tickets: $16

Information: (803) 988-0013 or www.tappsartscenter.com

ANSWE

Delirious Definitions

From The Knoxville News-Sentinel — August 17, 2012

Nightlife: Comedy

Comic sometimes still wins when crowds think he's rotten

By Wayne Bledsoe
bledsoew@knoxville.com
865-342-6444

Neil Hamburger and Todd Barry

With: Brendon Walsh

When: 8:30 (sold out) and 11 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 22

Where: Pilot Light, 106 E. Jackson Ave.

Tickets: $15, advance, $20, day of the show; available at www.thepilotlight.com

In addition to his many comedy commitments comedian Neil Hamburger is recording a new single with fellow comedian Margaret Cho.

Comediar. Neil Hamburger has learned some basic truths about the entertainment business.

"Sometimes the highlights and the low lights are the exact same light," says Hamburger in a call from Pasa Robles, Calif., where he performed the night before. "I did a sold-out show at Madison Square Garden opening for Tenacious D. The crowd was chanting the world '(expletive)' at me for the entire set and it was quite a negative response. So you could call that a low light. But on the other hand, I'm on stage at Madison Square Garden. I'm on the (expletive) marquee. The 20,000 people at the show, whatever their opinion of the show is, I'm the one on stage and they're in the audience who paid to see the show. So I would say, in this case, no matter how much they disliked the show, I still came out the winner."

Admittedly, Hamburger is not everyone's style of comedian. His thick glasses, oily combover and supremely uncomfortable look are the visual accompaniments to a string of riddles and one-liners that can be maddening, tasteless and for some, infuriating. During Knoxville's Big Ears Festival, Hamburger led a crowd on a walking tour of Knoxville in which he told off-the-wall histories of various buildings, along with insight into local culture. Were someone there who might've taken it seriously, the result could've been terrible — as it has been during some performances.

"Let's face it, when you've got a bunch of sour pusses in the crowd who are just not having fun, that can ruin the show for everyone else. One bad apple spoils the whole bunch? These people are like having a rotten egg in a bushel of apples and the apples get even more disgusting because it's like having a spoiled yolk dripping onto the apples. You do get that from time to time and unfortunately the only thing you can do sometimes is lash out at people and sometimes they enjoy the lashing out more than they do the jokes, which is too bad because the jokes are so carefully crafted. And the lashing out is just, well, lashing out."

Hamburger, who just might be related to a fellow named Gregg Turkington, says he began his comedy career while he was in high school.

"This was a thing where at the high school they'd pick some troubled kids and they'd try to get their minds focused on school work and not so focused on spray painting and sulking and other things," he says. "The school counselor thought it would be a good idea to get these kids to try stand-up comedy to help exorcise their demons and I took to it right away. The set was very poor, but I did feel that this was the type of thing that I could probably do rather than brain surgery, which I wouldn't be very good at. My hands are a little shaky and they were even then."

While Hamburger disagrees that he needed counseling, he says he wasn't very popular "with some of the other creeps" and getting on stage "trying to entertain a crowd of drunkards" seemed to be a fine option.

In the ensuing years he says "everything" has happened during shows — "fights, live births, we've had it all."

While he enjoys performing in England, he's had some tense moments on stage there. A joke about Pink Floyd incited the crowd.

It was even more raucous when he performed at the Reading Music Festival.

"The crowd was horrible from the first thing out of my mouth, so I started telling jokes about the headliners, which was Limp Bizkit and Guns N' Roses and that really got people angry ... I couldn't even hear what was coming out of my mouth because people were screaming so loudly."

With bottles flying from the crowd, Hamburger was escorted off the stage.

"We had a situation in Canada where a girl attacked me and police reports were actually filed. It's sad that in this day and age somebody tells a couple of jokes and somebody feels the need to react with violence. But I was talking to a guy who is a circus clown who works fairs and things. He's a traditional clown and he told me he was stabbed right in the face by a 13-year-old girl. People don't understand that a stage is a stage and we're here to lighten your load for an evening and there's no need for violence. ... Well, there may be a need for violence at a Linkin Park show. I think people should call the police and their local representatives to have that music stopped. It's just that bad."

SAVE ON THE SMOKIES
MOST FUN PLACE TO EAT!
DOLLY PARTON'S
Dixie Stampede
DINNER ATTRACTION
$4 OFF ADULT
$1 OFF KIDS
Limit up to 6 people per coupon. Valid at Pigeon Forge location only.
No cash value. Not valid in Preferred seating. Expires 10/30/12.
When making reservations mention CODE SENT12
This coupon (1) has no cash value and may only be redeemed in accordance with Dixie Stampede, LLC policies and procedures which may change or be modified from time to time, without notice. (2) may be declared void and unusable by Dixie Stampede, LLC at any time. (3) is not transferable. (4) may only be used thru 10/30/12, and (5) must be surrendered at the time it is used. Dixie Stampede, LLC reserves the right to deny entry to any person or remove any person from its premises. Cannot be combined with other offers, discounts, or promotions.
Call Early for Reservations 1-800-356-1676
or online at www.dixiestampede.com

BORN TO BOMB

Neil Hamburger is the world's worst comedian, and only sometimes the audiences are in on the joke

BY ROBERT MORAST
rmorast@argusleader.com

Listening to Neil Hamburger can be uncomfortable.

The stand-up comedian, dubbed "America's Funnyman," stalks the stage with the charisma of a Rat Pack-obsessed plumber.

Q&A

His dry, pop culture-obsessed jokes are regularly interrupted by his phlegm-clearing cough. And it's common for Hamburger's punchlines to hang over the silence of a stunned crowd.

The brainchild/alter-ego of Gregg Turkington, Hamburger is as bad as he sounds – and with a pomade-greased hair and oversized glasses, the guy doesn't look any better either.

But, like an enjoyably bad B-movie, Hamburger's obvious faults give this grating comedian charm, at least once you get the joke. Hamburger's DVDs often capture deadpan audiences or others yelling "you suck."

Tuesday, Hamburger's schtick comes to Nitwits Comedy Club. Here's what the California comedian – in character – says about his "depressing" career and being eager for his first Sioux Falls gig.

Question: You seem so uncomfortable on stage. Why do it?

Answer: Well, you know, there's just nothing else for me to do. I don't have any other skills, this is something I've been doing for so many years, I can't say that it has anything to do with choice. It's like being trapped in some endless cycle that you can't break out of. I've been booked solid for the last 15 years. We've got the next two years booked solid, and there doesn't seem to be any hope.

Q: What would you like to do if you could break out of this cycle?

A: I would like to sleep. Because of the way they book these things, you've got your show, then your 700-mile drive. It's almost like the people who set this up have it in for me.

Q: What would you want to do if you escape your lifestyle?

A: Something simpler like stacking BBs. Raising chinchillas.

Q: That's funny.

A: Thank you. People are programmed to laugh at this time of day, and not the time of day I do my show. I don't know why. But that's the way it is. If I had my shows at 4 p.m. I'd be doing great.

Q: So why suffer through this? Why don't you just quit?

A: Some people have jobs to support their families. My family is my creditors and these people will not accept "no" for answer.

Q: Much of your material is about pop music. Do you listen to this stuff, or do you just ridicule it?

A: I do listen to some of it for research purposes. But the thing is, the radio in my car broke a couple years ago. So now I'm just reading about it. I drive and listen to the negative thoughts in my head. As bad as this music is, it's better than listening to negative thoughts all day.

Q: Your fashion and delivery make you appear to be a throwback to the comedians of the '50s or '60s. But, most of your fans are young people. Why do you think that is?

A: Well, because this show is not for everyone. The young people do like to hear swearing and hearing obscene things, and dropping soup cans on your foot. As you get older, you try to avoid this type of act, but I could use audiences of all ages.

Q: Have you ever thought about trying anti-depressants?

A: I can't afford that. If some of your audience has any leftovers, bring them along. Because this is something that's completely out of my budget. We do get Red Bull and I don't know if that's an anti-depressant but it sure feels like it.

Q: What do you ask for on your performance rider?

A: We ask for clean water. We insist that the water is clean, hopefully store bought, but we'll take the tap water. I just don't want the filthy mop bucket. We do sometimes try to get some alcoholic beverages to numb the pain.

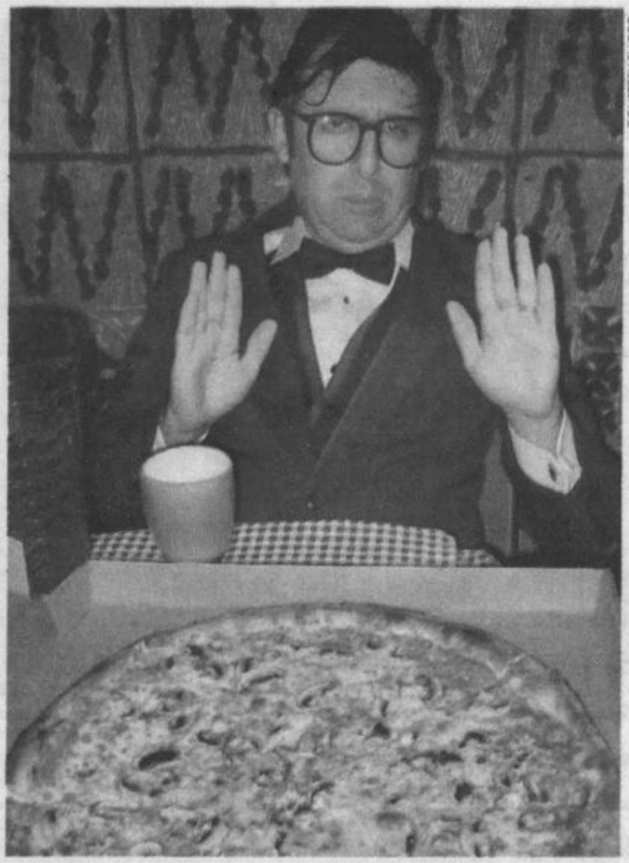
Q: Speaking of beverages, you're prone to holding multiple glasses of booze or water under your right arm during performances, sometimes dropping them. Why, and what's your record for holding the most glasses under your arm?

A: The problem is that if you leave them backstage, people will drink them or they will put date rape drugs in your drinks. I think five is my record. If they give me six drinks (at Nitwits) I will try to hold them.

Q: What do you expect from Sioux Falls?

A: I've played in New York City, and the crowds are not that tough, not very discerning. But I've played these small towns, and the crowds are tough and discerning. I think if you can make it in Sioux Falls, you can make it anywhere.

Reach reporter Robert Morast at 331-2313.



COURTESY PHOTO

IF YOU GO
Who: Neil Hamburger, Daiquiri, MC Timmy Smith
When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday
Where: Nitwits Comedy Club
Tickets: $10

103.7 KRRO Red Rock

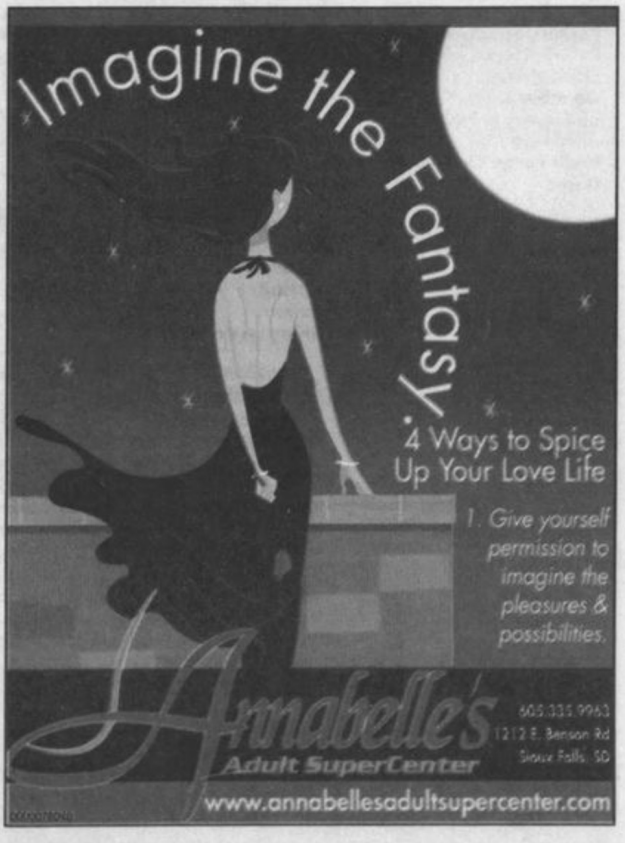
concert connection

AC/DC & Led Zeppelin Tribute Bands
Hells Bells & Zed Leppelin
Thursday, June 8
The Birdcage
Sioux Falls, SD
Tickets on-sale now $5

Poison & Cinderella
Sunday, June 18
Sioux Falls Arena
Sioux Falls, SD
Tickets on-sale now $38.50

103.7 KRRO Presents:
Rob Zombie & Anthrax
Monday, July 24
Ramkota Exhibit Hall
Sioux Falls, SD
Tickets on-sale now $38.50

For more concerts go to www.krro.com
presented by: 103.7 KRRO Red Rock Argus Leader
www.argusleader.com
0000075180



From Iowa City Press-Citizen — July 26, 2007

Special to the Press-Citizen

Neil Hamburger with Thora Birch on the set of "Tom Green Live."

Comedian takes aim at Iowa City

Neil Hamburger bringing wry sense of humor to The Picador

By Deanna Truman-Cook
Iowa City Press-Citizen

Life has been good to Neil Hamburger.

Right now, the comedian has the second most popular live Internet talk show, Poolside Chats with Neil Hamburger.

In addition, he stays busy with stand-up shows across the U.S. and overseas.

Hamburger, whose real name is Gregg Turkington, has made a name for himself with his wry sense of humor.

His jokes often center on his ex-wife and celebrities.

Hamburger makes a return visit to Iowa City at 9 p.m. Wednesday. Tickets to his show at The Picador are $7.

"I probably have been doing this way too long," Hamburger joked in a phone interview. "You will sense a certain amount of pettiness and anger."

Hamburger said all celebrities are potential targets during his show.

"Madonna, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Julia Roberts, you name it and I cover it," Hamburger said.

Hamburger has performed numerous times at the downtown 330 E. Washington St. venue when it was Gabe's, but this will be his first performance at The Picador.

"Even though the business has changed, our tastes haven't really changed," Picador manager Chris Wiersema said. "I know I personally have seen him several times."

Wiersema said the show is for anyone looking for a different type of comedy and said his whole lounge act is the joke.

If you go

- **What:** Comedian Neil Hamburger with Daquiri and Miracles of God.
- **When:** Doors open at 9 p.m. Wednesday.
- **Where:** The Picador, 330 E. Washington St.
- **Cost:** Tickets are $7.
- **Information:** Call 354-4788.

From The Guardian — January 20, 2007

A bumbling, angry drunk, Neil Hamburger loathes his audience almost as much as he pities himself. He makes his living by dying

JOHN SHEARER/WIREIMAGE.COM

From The Guardian — January 20, 2007

Dead meat

With his miserable excuse for a show, Neil Hamburger is so unfunny that he's funny. **David Whitehouse** relished his performances so much, he invited him to stay on his sofa. What could possibly go wrong?

As the lights dim at the Hammersmith Apollo, 5,000 excited Tenacious D fans pump their devil-shaped hand signs into the air. This is because they think they're about to see Jack Black and Kyle Gass's famous rock pantomime, just like it says on the tickets they paid for. Instead, Neil Hamburger slowly shuffles onto the stage like an arthritic Columbo. He's wearing a soiled tuxedo, his hair is plastered across his forehead with slobber and he's spilling the three vodka and tonics under his arm all over his trousers. The crowd fall silent as he approaches the microphone, where he spends two minutes audibly clearing phlegm from his throat. They begin to boo and hiss like a confused cauldron of hormonal soup.

Half an hour later the same 5,000 people are chanting "WANKER! WANKER! WANKER!", throwing coins at Neil's head and threatening to storm the stage (at a Tenacious D gig!). Yes, tonight will definitely be ending in a fight.

Neil Hamburger (the alter-ego of Gregg Turkington) is the bravest comedian in the world, but as much as I'm starting to suspect he may have balls the size of prize fighting fists, I'm starting to wonder whether it was a good idea to invite him to stay at my house. In fact, I'm starting to wonder whether he'll make it to my house at all.

I first heard of Neil Hamburger three years ago. A friend told me of an American stand-up comedian who made his living by dying, a bumbling, angry drunk who loathes his audience almost as much as he pities himself. Intrigued, I watched what clips I could find on the internet and picked up a few of his CDs.

In an age when comedians are meant to be full of insight and observation, not to mention funny, Hamburger was the complete opposite. He had the comic timing of a birthday heart attack and his attempts at audience participation were so misguided they nearly always ended in violence. He looked like a pervert's pervert, and dealt solely in outdated references, rubbish punnery and twisted Christmas cracker jokes like: "What do you get if you cross Elton John with a sabre toothed tiger... I don't know, but you'd better keep it away from your ass".

He produces a handful of coins from his coat pocket. 'These are what the people of Britain have thrown at me so far'

Whether you liked his jokes or not wasn't the point. What was funny was the reaction he got, how he dealt with it and how far he could take it before he got lynched. It's anti-humour, approached in a kamikaze style. He'd be the worst comedian in existence if he wasn't in on the joke. But he is, meaning that he may well be the best. So I sent him an email saying, should he ever play in the UK, I'd love to see the show, and if need be, given the largely crap lot of the travelling comedian, he could sleep on my sofa.

Remember the documentary that followed Pete Burns as he was released from prison after serving time for assaulting his boyfriend? As part of his bail conditions prevented him from living within the M25, Pete moved into the Plymouth house of a fan he'd never met. Their relationship ended when Pete, a mannequin as made by Aardman, stormed out into the night. That's what I think about as I open the door three years later to hear the words

"Hello. My name is Neil Hamburger". He has with him a bottle of vodka, the sole item on his tour rider. He shuffles in and I pour him a drink.

Now Neil Hamburger is, of course, a character. He can be switched on or off, the disguise, unlike that of Pete Burns, removed or applied. However, when your job is to make yourself as hated as possible, it's hard not to take a little of your work home with you. From the pocket of his coat he produces handfuls of coins, mostly coppers.

"These," he explains, "are what the people of Britain have thrown at me so far". He's been averaging £20 a night (which in shrapnel isn't bad going).

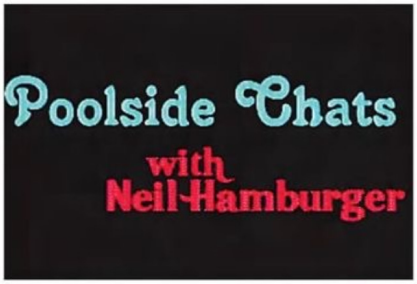
It seems Tenacious D's

tour of the UK hasn't been kind to Neil Hamburger. The people of Birmingham in particular took a big disliking to him when he stood on stage in front of 12,000 paying punters at the NEC and sobbed a "Why did the chicken cross the road" routine about the death of Princess Diana (whom he once paid tribute to by releasing a seven inch record in her honour which came with a free tissue and a blank B side perfect for a moment's silence). In fact, the same had happened in Brighton, where he'd pondered why Britney Spears sells so many albums ("because the public", ie the audience, "are so horny and depressed"). And Manchester, where he followed it by suggesting (to an audience of teenage rock fans, let's not forget) that the difference between Courtney Love and the American flag was that it wasn't acceptable to urinate on the American flag.

"I didn't even get this much money thrown at me at Madison Square Garden," he sighs.

Yes, the man on my sofa, a comedian who makes Andy Kaufman's famously inept Tony Clifton character look like Peter Kay playing a children's party, has played a sold-out Madison Square Garden. He's also appeared on America's Jimmy Kimmel show (which is like GG Allin turning up on Jonathan Ross), and opened for some of America's biggest rock bands. He counts among his devoted celebrity fanbase Danny DeVito, Tim Robbins and Tom Green, with whom he makes his own internet TV show, the brilliant Poolside Chats With Neil Hamburger which is well worth an hour on YouTube. Last year the first ever NeilCon was held in Alabama. If he'd have achieved the things he has telling normal jokes he'd be the most famous comedian on Earth.

Eager to see him at work we head to his gig at Hammersmith in the early evening but, by the time we arrive, there is already



An act that's never well done... Poolside Chats is an internet TV show Neil Hamburger makes with Tom Green

It's anti-humour, approached in a kamikaze style. He'd be the worst comedian in the world if he wasn't in on the joke

an enormous queue of teenagers in Tenacious D T-shirts who Neil predicts "won't like me one bit". I wish him luck and walk out into the crowd to watch the show with Neil's wife, Simone.

Just two minutes into his set and the place rings with booing and the dull thud of coins hitting the curtain behind Neil's head. "D! D! D! D!" they scream in the hope that it might speed up the arrival of the band. Neil loses his temper.

"Jack Black has given me his personal permission to tell another four jokes every time you shout 'D!', you pointless cocksuckers," he rants. The crowd go silent. As much as they hate him, he has them under more control than most comedians could ever muster.

Eventually he runs out of time and with the words "Goodnight cocksuckers," Neil signs off. Exiting the stage he stops only to pick up the coins being lobbed in his direction when suddenly one hits him square in the face. It looks painful. I turn to Simone for her thoughts just in time to see her march over to Neil's assailant and punch him twice in the ear. He has the shocked, shamed look of a boy whose mum has caught him making love to himself. Being punched by the artist's wife isn't something you expect to happen when you throw a coin at a gig, but then if you throw a coin at anyone then you probably deserve to be punched in the ear.

We decide to wait until late to avoid Neil (or his wife) getting lynched in the car park, which gives him time to tell Jack Black how his wife punched a Tenacious D fan, before we take the evening's bottle of vodka home with us. It wasn't the fight we expected the night to end in, but that's probably a good thing.

When I wake next morning, Neil Hamburger has gone. In his place is a pile of change.●

To buy Neil Hamburger's recordings visit www.americasfunnyman.com

From The Baltimore Sun — July 15, 2004

Scene

Clubs ♦ Bars ♦ Nightlife

Comic sees nothing funny about his act

Hamburger is bringing his bad stand-up to the Ottobar

By SARAH SCHAFFER
SUN STAFF

"This stuff came out of the can spoiled. The schtick's ... been ruined since I came up with it," reported mopy comic Neil Hamburger, as he called from Los Angeles to talk about his act.

Currently playing the nation's rock clubs and, he says, the occasional casino or "second-tier" pizza parlor, Hamburger indeed covers bizarre and boring topics — from candy fillings to kangaroos — delivering each sorry punchline with a heavy dose of pathetic ennui.

And though many of his sappy shows have received negative audience responses, the tide may be turning for the forever tuxedoed funnyman.

Hamburger (who may or may not actually be Amarillo Records founder and underground indie-rock hero Gregg Turkington) is the leading figure in a new form of anti-comedy entertainment that's beginning to attract fans from the hip-and-jaded set. To them, badness is just the point, so the supremely unfunny Hamburger makes a perfect champion.

But like Andy Kaufman's obnoxious Tony Clifton character, the man may be ahead of his time — understood by few and perhaps appreciated by even fewer.

Years from now, the mainstream masses may laud him as a creative genius. For now, however, he'll just keep trudging along — or in his words, "going wherever a laugh is needed."

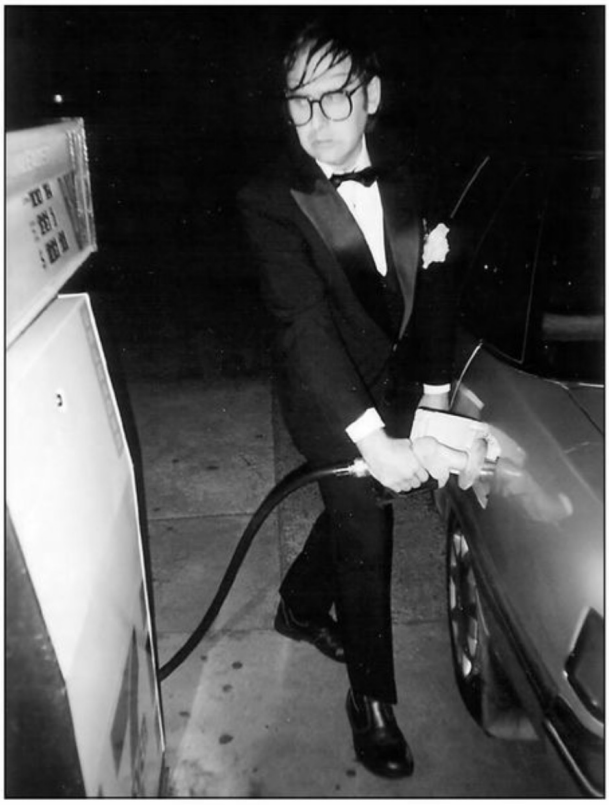
With the approach of tomorrow's show at the Ottobar, we phoned Hamburger to talk about his storied past and dubious future.

He answered our queries in classic Hamburger fashion: with sullen tones, strange responses and *yes*, maybe even a little humor.

Here's an excerpt from the interview:

Some reports claim that you are Amarillo Records founder Gregg Turkington. Can you confirm or deny this?

No. I'm not [Turkington]. Although I wish that I were sometimes, because that guy is not on the road 395 days a year.



DRAG CITY RECORDS

Neil Hamburger's sullen anti-comedy is beginning to attract attention in a too-hip underground that appreciates badness.

But Neil, aren't there only 365 days in a year?

You should see my booking calendar. [My publicists] find these days. They can make them happen. They find these shows on the borders of time zones ... to try to squeeze more work out of me. They've got a map of the continental divide. They've got everything, and THEY ARE RUTHLESS!

How did you develop your catchphrase, "That's my life"?

It was out of desperation because you see all of these comedians with these catchphrases, and they are multi-millionaires. It was like if you were hit by lightning and died; except, I didn't die, I was inspired — and it wasn't lightning.

Why has your act had recent success in the hipster scene, in particular at nightclubs and rock venues?

I think these young people have a lot of burdens on their shoulders ... because of all the problems today. They want to go out and throw down a few mint juleps, [but] the music [at many bars and clubs] will give you ear cancer. These people are much happier to come out and see a professional comedian who puts on an actual stage outfit and gives his all.

But what happens if you deliver a sub-par performance?

Sometimes they [audiences] are so hopped up on mint juleps — sniffing the paste and all that they do — that they don't really notice the difference.

So, for a guy who's endured years of bad shows and long nights, what has been the low point of your career?

It's one solid sinkhole. If you fall into a bottomless pit, and someone asks you what's the low point, what do you say?

Then what will you do next?

I'm making the best I can out of it. But I'm possibly not qualified for this job. Better things are ahead and [I'm] just going to keep on rolling. [The new tour] has been fantastic in a wonderful way — but not really, not literally.

Catch Neil Hamburger tomorrow at the Ottobar. Nick Flanagan, the High School Hellcats and Hockey Island are also billed. Doors open at 9 p.m. Tickets are $8 in advance and $10 at the door. The Ottobar is at 2549 N. Howard St. Call 410-662-0069 or visit www.theottobar.com.

For more club events, see Page 33.

From The San Francisco Examiner — August 05, 2021

Gregg Turkington commits to uneasy comedy with Neil Hamburger

By Will Reisman
Special to The Examiner

The end game of comedians is obviously to make their audiences laugh, but the great humorists know how to mix jokes with an unsettling sense of sadness.

The late Mitch Hedberg and Steven Wright's wry and deadpan everyday observations are comingled with references to anxiety and existential dread. Even the manic characters that inhabit Tim Robinson's Netflix gem "I Think You Should Leave" are imbued with a sense of pathos—deeply insecure individuals who defend those insecurities to ridiculous ends.

It is that combination of comedy and tragedy that impelled the creation of Neil Hamburger, the gauche alter ego of Gregg Turkington. A repugnant and washed-up comic with a greasy combover and oversized glasses, Hamburger was inspired by the bygone lounge lizards that inhabited Z-list club circuits in Reno and Lake Tahoe. But Turkington says the character also had roots from a particularly troubling scene he witnessed in San Francisco.

Apparently at the advice of his psychiatrist, one aspiring comedian took to the stage at the venerable Holy City Zoo, the bygone comedy spot on Clement Street. The idea was to exorcise his demons of anxiety and social discomfort through the healing power of comedy and human connection. Predictably, the foray took a disastrous turn.

"The guy disintegrated out there," says Turkington, who will perform as Neil Hamburger on Saturday at the Mint Plaza. "He wasn't a performer. He was just a sick man."

Neil Hamburger straddles the line precariously between being a performer and a sick man. Spewing out callous, groan-worthy jokes on topics that have little relevance in today's society, Hamburger is the encapsulation of an anachronistic past that's not returning anytime soon.

Turkington plays up the unforgivable louche character, but what makes the performance work is the commitment to the bit. There is no wink-wink, nod-nod to his antics, just pure chaos and a lot of uncomfortable laughs for the uninitiated.

With a comedic act so dependent on the call-and-response, interactive nature of live performances, sitting out the past year and a half has been particularly tough for Turkington, who has been touring consistently for decades. Without the feedback of audiences to inspire him, Turkington sought other ways to engage with his fans during his long absence. For $10 each, he started sending detailed Neil Hamburger-penned postcards to fans across the world. The postcards were written in Hamburger's trademark cranky style from locales that would be typical of a fifth-rate performer.

"I would think of where a Neil Hamburger type would be on his fictitious tour," said Turkington. "So, the postcards would usually come from like a Travelodge in some weird Florida town or from some greasy burger joint in Cleveland. It was actually a good way of keeping that character fresh."

Turkington lived in San Francisco throughout the 1980s and '90s, and his comedy career really took off while he lived in The City. He would record crank calls and distribute them on cassette tapes to his friends. He said coming back from his absence for his first "real" show back in San Francisco (he did a quick set in Los Angeles a few weeks ago), was significant to him, given his local roots.

A regular at the Independent and other indie rock venues, Turkington always has strayed from traditional comedy clubs, and his Mint Plaza gig will continue in that tradition. (He said he was intrigued by the site after learning that legendary local Peaches Christ appeared there.)

Without giving away too much, Turkington said that Neil Hamburger probably will offer a few unseemly opinions about the pandemic at the Mint show.

"He's never been the most topical guy," said Turkington. "But I'm sure it will come up. In a way, making jokes about COVID is kind of fresh, because no one has seen any live comedy since the pandemic is started. Anything is better than recycling the same old jokes about smoking weed."

Fans can expect some laughs and some groans and maybe a touch of earnest connection, but they can rest easy knowing that Turkington is not onstage at the advice of his therapist.

IF YOU GO: Neil Hamburger
Where: Old Mint, Fifth and Mission streets, S.F.
When: 8 p.m. Aug. 7
Tickets: $30 (sold out)
Contact: talentmoat.com

Former San Franciscan Gregg Turkington brings his alter ego, gauche comic Neil Hamburger, to The City this week.

COURTESY SIMONE TURKINGTON

From Chicago Tribune — May 12, 2017

IN PERFORMANCE

It's a comedy disaster, honed to perfection

By Zach Freeman
Chicago Tribune

Grease-slicked hair stripes across his forehead in a blatant comb-over. He spills half of his drink setting it on a music stand and pours the rest on his head a few minutes later. He loudly and abruptly clears his throat, pauses, and then clears it again.

Ladies and germs, this is Neil Hamburger, the boorish, often shrill, tuxedo-clad, sad-sack alter ego of comedian Gregg Turkington. He's here to entertain and he is incredibly, impressively, exquisitely unfunny.

And that's the point.

Neil Hamburger — whose non-sequitur-laden act plays out like a brutally crushing mockery of Jay Leno crossed with a bitter, washed-up drunk on a bar stool — is a near-perfect case study in the upside down world of anti-comedy, where groaners are golden and agitation is an art form. Often compared to Tony Clifton, the churlish entertainer created by the late Andy Kaufman, Turkington's creation is much less cocksure but equally abrasive.

The entire premise of anti-comedy is predicated on the notion that if you travel far enough down the rabbit hole of humor you'll sail past funny, borderline, bad and even plain old terrible and emerge on the other side with so-bad-it's-good and disaster-as-art-form.

If you accept this theory, Hamburger's your guy.

As Hamburger, Turkington has over the course of 25 years released a series of bizarre albums (with titles like "Raw Hamburger" and "Left for Dead in Malaysia"), appeared on offbeat Cartoon Network shows like "Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!" and even starred in a feature film (2015's mostly well-received "Entertainment"). He's also toured the country several times over.

As part of his current tour, he was in Chicago on Wednesday night, crisscrossing the stage in Lincoln Hall's intimate auditorium with a drink alternately in his hand and tucked into the crook of his arm. With frequent grimaces and heavy sighs, Hamburger worked through an hour of painfully plodding material that drew cheers, heckles and, believe it or not, laughter.

"What is the most disgusting thing about eating sushi off of Britney Spears' chest? The sushi probably came from Panda Express."

His jokes are eye-rollingly bad, but there's a certain lyricism to the way he formats them to ensure maximum awkwardness. Wearing black-framed glasses, Hamburger belts out his set-ups with a determined lack of grace, frequently repeating certain words or even reiterating a phrase. He can draw out the setup for a joke for several minutes, stumbling over phrasing or stopping midsentence to (once again) clear his phlegmy throat before starting completely over.

Sometimes his setups have false endings, with Hamburger adding a pause that implies the question is done before plowing on with further unnecessary and often incredibly intricate details. When he does get to delivering his punchlines — after a call and response from the audience — they're inevitably low-rent, poorly executed and notably outdated. They're also disproportionately directed at musicians.

TAYLOR HILL/GETTY

Gregg Turkington as Neil Hamburger, shown in a 2010 performance, has played that alter ego for more than two decades.

Neil Hamburger's jokes are eye-rollingly bad, but there's a certain lyricism to the way he formats them.

"Why ... Why ... Why did the compassionate nurse — the compassionate nurse — why did the compassionate nurse smother her patient to death with a pillow? Well, because she found out he was in Dire Straits."

Over the course of the night, Hamburger torched a long list of famous bands and musicians: Gene Simmons, Limp Bizkit, Iron Maiden, Madonna, the Eagles, Tupac Shakur and even the Beatles. At one point — after remarking offhandedly, "Wow, can you believe it guys? It's 2017!" — he seemed to be pushing back in time to see how out-of-date he could get, working his way back to jokes featuring Buddy Holly and Ritchie Valens.

"Why was it always so hot onstage at a Grateful Dead concert? Because none of their fans worked."

Belabored puns make frequent appearances in Neil Hamburger's work, and they were especially noticeable in a series of knock-knock jokes that were sprinkled throughout.

Example: "Knock-knock. Who's there? Witch. Witch who? Which of you sold the bad drugs that killed the lead singer of Blind Melon?"

It's an oddly cerebral experience watching a comedian bomb so hard with such blatantly bad material that he crosses over into a next level of comedic territory. And it's especially interesting to consider what reactions a show like this would generate from the uninitiated. It would be an entirely different experience to stumble upon a Hamburger show by accident than it was to witness one with an audience eagerly along for the ride.

But not all of Hamburger's fans know how to respectfully enjoy a comedy show. At one point a man yelled something out during a joke, and Hamburger showed that he's used to hecklers, snapping out a lengthy and gory reprimand, and telling him adamantly, "If you have something to say about the show, go out into the street and get hit by a car!"

He may mock the standard trappings of stand-up, but Hamburger takes comedy seriously.

Zach Freeman is a freelance writer.

ctc-arts@chicagotribune.com

From The San Francisco Examiner — October 13, 2016

Not concerned with mass appeal, Turkington thrives as Neil Hamburger

IF YOU GO: Neil Hamburger
Where: Independent, 628 Divisadero St., S.F. **When:** 8 p.m. Sunday
Tickets: $16 **Contact:** (415) 771-1421, www.theindepdentsf.com

By Will Reisman
Special to S.F. Examiner

With his ultra-greasy comb over, garish lounge tuxedo and array of cringe-worthy one-liners, Neil Hamburger is going to offend some people. And that's just fine for Gregg Turkington, the comedian who created the louche, ridiculous persona.

"I'm certainly prepared for the probability that most people will think what I'm doing is crazy," says Turkington, who performs as the character at The Independent this weekend.

Turkington, who lived in San Francisco in the 1980s-90s, was inspired to try out Hamburger after witnessing unseemly oddballs who made up the low-stakes comedy circuit of Reno and Lake Tahoe casinos. He originally imitated the curmudgeonly comics by making crank phone calls, before moving on to comedy albums, and eventually taking the stage as the fully-realized character in a standup routine.

"It started with this preposterous joke that there really should be no audience for, but to me, they were really funny ideas," says Turkington, who starred as a comic playing the Neil Hamburger character in the 2015 movie "Entertainment."

He adds, "Now this character is pretty well known, has been in a feature-film -- it's kind of crazy how big it's become."

Those unfamiliar with the character sometimes find him off-putting or bizarre; Turkington says reactions to his shows vary from place to place and on case-by-case basis.

"I think it's more interesting for me when I don't know what to expect," says Turkington. "Sometimes you walk into these small towns and you think people are going to tar and feather you, and they couldn't be nicer. And I've opened shows in San Francisco --- my town, basically -- and people have been incredibly hostile."

Interestingly, Turkington's other famous comic persona is the opposite of Neil Hamburger.

Working with Tim Heidecker, he created an alternative "Gregg Turkington" character -- an obsequious, clueless film critic with a love for VHS movies.

The comics' movie review podcast "On Cinema at the Cinema" is filled with ancillary details and little analysis.

Although it started as a one-off bit, the podcast evolved into a mini soap-opera now airing on Adult Swim, with both characters developing as ultra-exaggerated versions of themselves.

Turkington concedes that "On Cinema" and Neil Hamburger may be confusing and difficult for newcomers. At the same time, he loathes being called an "alternative comic."

"I just don't think I could do 'traditional standup' any more than I could repair a Jaguar," he says. But at the end of the day, I'm trying to make people laugh. It's just a specific audience I'm targeting."

From The Philadelphia Inquirer — November 05, 2015

The man who made Neil Hamburger

By A.D. Amorosi
FOR THE INQUIRER

When stand-up comedian Neil Hamburger speaks, his timing is off, his voice is as nasal and phlegmy as his manner is aggressive, and his jokes are unfunny and dated. There's a greasiness to his hair that matches his mien and an oversize-ness to his glasses that goes perfectly with the entirety of that off-kilter persona.

"That's who he's been forever," says Gregg Turkington, the Australia-born, Arizona-raised actor-writer-comic who created Hamburger in the early 1990s, and who brings him to Johnny Brenda's on Thursday for a sold-out show. Next week, on Nov. 13, Hamburger makes his leading-role debut in Rick Alverson's *Entertainment*, which Turkington wrote with Allentown-born comic Tim Heidecker.

Faux comic Neil Hamburger (a.k.a. Gregg Turkington).

"Hamburger is a guy who hit the pizza-parlor circuit with lots of aspiration — only to become a grizzled veteran with 10,000 shows under his belt, a variety of bizarre situations, and somewhat less aspiration," Turkington says.

He started Hamburger's roll as part of the indie-rock scene with records on Chicago's Drag City la-

See **HAMBURGER** on C3

Hamburger

Continued from C1

bel (which still releases his albums, e.g. 2014's *First of Dismay*) and an act as louche and muddled as it is crudely confrontational.

Despite all that, Hamburger is adored — a ranting anti-comic in the mold of Lord Buckley and Andy Kaufman, and one who has fielded film offers — but always to do something dumb, his creator says.

"Most directors and writers imagined Hamburger in some hyped-up *Borat*-style prank comedy where you put him on the street and see what 'hilarious' situations he got himself into," Turkington says. "That wasn't ever going to work. There are no 'hilarious adventures' offstage. The guy is a shell."

Turkington is protective not just of his creation, but of himself. He has long been reluctant to jump into film, with only a few credits as Hamburger (such as 2006's *Tenacious D in The Pick of Destiny*).

Around 2007, he started hanging with Heidecker and fellow Philadelphian Eric Wareheim as part of their Tim & Eric schtick, and eventually interested their pal writer/director Alverson, who wanted Turkington in a non-Hamburger appearance for his lo-fi, mean-spirited, social-climbing 2012 flick, *The Comedy*.

"I told Rick I didn't want to act, that I couldn't act," Turkington says, "yet he was persistent especially because of how I tried to get out of it."

But in the end, Turkington was so thrilled to work with Alverson that when the director brought up the possibility of a film expanding on the Hamburger character, he jumped. "Alverson knew Hamburger was an empty vessel offstage, a shell, as that is what I always thought of that character. The offstage Neil Hamburger is just not the life of the party."

Meantime, other oddball directors, such as Peyton Reed, took notice of *The Comedy*. Reed hired Turkington for the summer's Marvel hit, *Ant-Man*. "It's hilarious and interesting someone like Reed wound up at the helm of this gigantic movie. Madder still considering unusual casting, such as me," he said.

When it came to tackling *Entertainment*, Turkington, Heidecker, and Alverson used California's Mojave Desert, a near-barren Bakersfield, and parts of the Golden State's north to magnify the bleakness of its main character, stuck in a show-biz dead-end.

Turkington wanted to show a California life miles away from the Beach Boys' "Fun, Fun, Fun" and found it in towns such as Modesto and Tehachapi, with their beyond-dive bars and automobile graveyards.

As for the Hamburger persona, Turkington and company "called him 'The Comedian' so that he wasn't wed to my character's backstory, which allowed me to do things I wouldn't do as Hamburger."

But Turkington created Hamburger as a character who can change at his maker's whim. Listen to the albums chronologically and you'll hear slight changes happening, "as they would in real life, or listening to Pink Floyd's first album to its last," he said. "If you plucked from the middle it would mean nothing, but taken in order, you'll hear gradual changes."

As for his stand-up routine, Turkington as Hamburger tells audiences there is no topicality ("I think we can let go of the Michael Dukakis material"), let alone a plan. "I'll just be by the bar, go backstage, put on that costume, and I'm ready to go."

From The Daily Chronicle — November 10, 2011

NEIL HAMBURGER

Shtick and irony make for a good night of bad jokes

By ANDREW MITCHELL
amitchell@shawmedia.com

His timing is poor, his jokes are out of date, and he looks like he's constantly drenched in flop sweat.

On the surface, these are not the makings of a great stand-up comedian. But that hasn't stopped Neil Hamburger from gaining a cult following among alternative comedy fans across the country – and especially in DeKalb – over the past 15 years.

Hamburger – an act created by comedian and musician Gregg Turkington – returns to DeKalb Friday, headlining a show at Otto's Niteclub & Underground, combining his love of old-time show business with a cutting, temperamental sense of irony.

Like Andy Kaufman during his Tony Clifton phase, Turkington fully embodies Hamburger. His policy when it comes to interviews is to perform them only as Hamburger, never as himself.

That blurring of reality is part of what makes a Neil Hamburger show so unique. Patrick Kelly of Lombard, whose band, "Richardson" Richardson, is opening for Hamburger Friday, said he often has to bring friends to a live performance before they fully grasp the appeal of watching someone do bad comedy so well.

Kelly said he first became a fan of Hamburger watching online videos and his appearances on the surreal Cartoon Network comedy show, "Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!"

"It's the most ridiculous deadpan comedy," he said. "It's almost joke suicide."

But within that act, there also is a warmth that comes from Hamburger's homage to comedians of decades past, coming on stage in an awkwardly dressed tuxedo, holding a snifter of brandy.

Turkington – speaking as Hamburger – also expressed a lot of fondness for performing in DeKalb.

"DeKalb, that's a hometown sort of crowd," he said. "They've got big hearts and they like to laugh."

Still, as warmly as DeKalb audiences have received Neil Hamburger, fans like Kelly said it's not a full show unless something goes terribly and hilariously wrong.

At one show in DeKalb, an overzealous fan tried to finish Hamburger's punch line before the comedian could, only to get an extended profanity-laden takedown.

At Hamburger's last show at Otto's, Kelly said Hamburger saw a poster for a Red Hot Chili Pepper's cover band, and spent nearly 20 minutes ripping the long-running rock band apart.

"I love how he really just personalizes every set," Kelly said. "When we were asked to open for him, we jumped at the opportunity."

Hamburger said his mood is often related to whether he's performing at a theater with seats, or a standing-room-only rock club.

"If you're on a bill with one of these dirt-bad rock and roll bands ... where everyone's loaded on $2 beer and everyone's not seated, then it can be very different," he said. "Otto's is obviously an exception, otherwise we wouldn't be coming back."

Still, rock and roll bands have helped Hamburger gain exposure and notoriety throughout his career; Hamburger has shared stages with bands like Tenacious D and Guided by Voices.

Hamburger also released a music album of his own called, "Neil Hamburger Sings Country Winners," featuring songs such as "How Can I Still Be Patriotic (When They've Taken Away My Right To Cry)."

Hamburger said he's not touring with a band this time, but audiences can expect a song or two Friday.

Tickets are still on sale for $10 via Otto's website for this 21 and older show.

If you go

What: Neil Hamburger, Major Entertainer Mike H., and "Richardson" Richardson
Where: Otto's Niteclub & Underground, 118 E. Lincoln Highway, DeKalb
When: 9 p.m. Friday
Cost: $10, at www.ottosdekalb.com
Information: 21 and older show, www.myspace.com/americasfunnyman

From Argus-Leader — July 26, 2007

COURTESY PHOTO

Q A NEIL HAMBURGER

World's worst comedian?

BY ERIC HAHN
erhahn@argusleader.com

With a greasy comb-over, a bad suit and a constantly awkward mug, comedian Neil Hamburger's stage performances consist mainly of frequent throat clearing and a barrage of poorly timed jokes about celebrities and life on the road.

But if you don't think the lack of talent is part of the act, the joke is on you. Internet research suggests that Hamburger is the alter ego of punk rocker and music producer Gregg Turkington.

But grilling Hamburger on his real identity would be like trying to get Borat to show you Sascha Baron Cohen's drivers license or forcing Hulk Hogan to admit he doesn't actually punch people in the forehead.

We recently caught up with Hamburger via telephone to preview his Monday appearance at Nutty's North. Here's a taste of his schtick:

Q: Do you get a lot of people coming to your shows who are familiar with your work? Or do you take people by surprise?

A: We get all types. You don't always get the repeat customers, but you don't always need the repeat customers because, I think, there's 4 billion people on this Earth that have not seen this show yet. If each of them goes just once, they don't have to come back again. And if each of them goes just once, then we'll do pretty well with this act.

Q: How many of those 4 billion people on this planet are Neil Hamburger groupies?

A: Groupies? Well, you're talking single digits on that one, I'm afraid.

Q: There has to be a few.

A: I don't know. A few is the word for it. You know the groupies tend to gravitate toward these degenerate rock 'n' rollers, you know. People like ... Who's the guy who threw himself up to death? Was that Bill Haley? That type of scene.

Q: You have this old-school, classy look going on. Do you have any style tips for men?

A: Thank you. They need to cut off some of those filthy beards that are falling into the food.

Q: When you get ready for a show, who does your hair? Do you put product in? How do you get it like that?

A: I do it myself. It's strictly a one-man show. I try to do my hair and try to get a good look. You do want to look like you put some effort into your show, and that you didn't just walk onto stage in a mustard-stained T-shirt like some of these fat slobs in Yo La Tengo and some of these awful bands going around stinking up the place.

Q: You must be in some serious debt.

A: Ah. Yes. Debt and physical pain. Because you're not really getting a chance to jog around the track, shall we say, when you're doing these sorts of shows on this sort of schedule.

Q: Have you tried one of those massaging seat covers that you can plug into the cigarette lighter of your car?

A: Yeah. I nearly died. I got electrocuted by one of those things. There was some sort of short in it. I'm driving along, the whole side of my leg is kind of feeling this sort of numbness. And I'm thinking, "What's going on there?" Suddenly, I feel this voltage going all the way up my body. I had to let go of the steering wheel. It was a metal steering wheel. That stuff is dangerous. Be very careful of what you buy at the Goodwill.

Q: You always complain about the restaurants you visit while on tour, but you must have adapted your digestive system pretty well to life on the road by now.

A: When you have a debilitating disease as I do – cancer.

Q: You have cancer?

A: I believe I have a cancer. I have not been able to afford a true diagnosis. But all signs point to yes on that. So you have something like that, and it will eat up anything that will go into your stomach. Cancers are very hungry. They will eat anything that comes their way. It's probably better if you give it fruit cocktail, then maybe it won't eat your bone. It won't start eating your skin. I think by eating more fruit cocktail, I think more people can stave off cancer. Now, I'm not Dr. Koop, but this is something that's worked for me.

Q: What is the origin of your last name, Hamburger?

A: That's just a stage name. My real name was too long and too uncommercial and too unhealthy, quite frankly. My birth name was Neil Double Bacon Cheeseburger. And we just didn't have a career with that, so we shortened it like a lot of the great comedians do. Like Jerry Seinfield.

Reach Eric Hahn at 331-2333.

IF YOU GO:

WHO: Neil Hamburger, Daiquiri, Moist Host, Timmy Smith
WHERE: Nutty's North
WHEN: 8 p.m. Monday
COST: $10, available by calling 331-6455 or at nuttys.com

From The Los Angeles Times — February 21, 1999

Here and Now

If This Guy Gets a Laugh, It's All Over

Comedy, as Steve Martin once remarked, is not pretty. In the case of Neil Hamburger, a thirtysomething comedian from Culver City, it isn't even funny. Though he spends 360 nights a year doing stand-up, the hapless comic hasn't been able to master—or even vaguely come to grips with—the art of getting laughs from a live audience.

And yet "America's Funnyman," as he calls himself, may well be the hottest underground comic in the country. Hamburger's act has received rave reviews from Spin and Entertainment Weekly, and his CDs and singles have found favor with an ever-expanding legion of followers, all of whom derive great pleasure from the aural spectacle of Hamburger shifting uncomfortably before indifferent—even hostile—throngs.

"Left for Dead in Malaysia," his newest CD, delivers more of the same, with Hamburger offering up stale observations on dentists, dating and fast food to a plainly uncomprehending Kuala Lumpur audience. Though you can even hear someone activating the club's jukebox halfway through Hamburger's act, the comic swears it's far from the toughest crowd he's faced.

"They were talking all the way through my set," he says. "But because I couldn't understand what they were talking about, I didn't hear any of the negative comments about my act that I hear in other cities—and which can really throw off your timing if you let them get to you."

Though he claims to be constantly on the road, his propensity for last-minute cancellations—and his longtime association with Chicago's hipster record label Drag City—has led some to suggest that Neil Hamburger is merely an elaborate hoax. But Hamburger himself is too busy with upcoming projects to respond to such spurious rumors.

Photo by Lizzie Kate Gray

Comedian Neil Hamburger, who makes a living being *not* funny, says he got into stand-up on the suggestion of his psychiatrist as "a form of therapy." Hamburger's act has received rave reviews, and his CDs and singles are popular.

"One record that I would like to make is an album of religious humor," he reveals. "I even have a title in mind: 'Laugh Out Lord.' I have a lot of religious beliefs, and it would be nice to do something with them."

Originally getting into stand-up comedy at the urging of his psychiatrist—"He suggested I try it as a form of therapy"—Hamburger has since forsaken his Culver City home for an endless string of roadside motels. Still, his heart and his personal belongings remain in Southern California. "I'm proud to say that my storage locker, with all my possessions in it, is right there in the Los Angeles area," he says. "So I keep my finger on the pulse-beat, so to speak."

As he admits in one of his routines on "Left For Dead in Malaysia," Hamburger's frequent absences contributed greatly to the recent breakup of his marriage. And yet, however grueling the life of a stand-up comic may be, Hamburger has no intention of giving up his newfound fame.

"It's too late to change now," he says. "This is what I do. I have no choice."

—DAN EPSTEIN

From The Boston Globe — May 13, 2005

Still a character, Hamburger relishes role

By Nick A. Zaino III
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Comedy Notes

The fact that hapless comedian Neil Hamburger is a fictional character has long been something of an open joke. Hamburger, who comes to Great Scott in Allston tomorrow with the band Pleaseeasaur, is the invention of Gregg Turkington, former head of the indie rock label Amarillo Records.

For the lucky and the hip who've found their way to his releases over the past decade, the Hamburger character is either a brilliant satire of stand-up comedy or Turkington just goofing off, having the time of his life. Audiences may never know which, since Turkington refuses to break character — unlike, say, Barry Humphries, who will talk about Dame Edna when he's not in costume.

Hamburger calls the stories that say he is actually Turkington "yellow journalism," something he thought died with Sinclair Lewis.

"Hey, if there was a rumor going around that I was Paul McCartney, we'd get even more people coming out," he says by cellphone from the lobby of a Ramada Inn in New Jersey. "Anything that brings these people in. Feel free to start any rumor you want."

PHOTO/TINA HIGGINS

Neil Hamburger serves up his comedy with a dose of reality.

Hamburger's latest CD, "Great Moments at Di Presa's Pizza House With TV Comic Neil Hamburger," is odd even by the standard of his previous releases. "Di Presa's" is supposedly an audio documentary of one of the few places in the country Hamburger was able to hold down a steady gig. Hamburger says the album was commissioned by Di Presa's to mark its 40th anniversary last year, but the place closed down before they could have the celebration.

"They were going to print these and sell them as a souvenir," he says. "They even had one of the top clowns from the area."

The characters on the release include Rono Laird, the owner of Di Presa's, who complains that health inspectors should overlook the rat droppings and report that the food "came in contact with love"; and Leroy Brothers, a white comedian who thinks he's black.

Most of the interviews aren't happy, and one even ends in tears as a woman declares that she hates her life.

"It's true to life, I think is the point," Hamburger says. "You could give these people laughing gas and get them a little more happy, but it wouldn't be true."

Hamburger's act has always been a bit over the top. If Andy Kaufman's Tony Clifton had low self-esteem, he would be Neil Hamburger. Still, anyone who has spent time in clubs could believe a comic like Hamburger is out there on the circuit. His albums have no laugh track; instead you hear waitresses talking and dropping glasses in the middle of a routine. Most of the time, Hamburger's discouraged, half-swallowed laugh is preserved by a long silence, after a joke bombs.

"There's enough laughter and joy that comes through the tape," Hamburger says. "We don't have to use this studio trickery."

The new characters on the album stretch a listener's suspension of disbelief to its breaking point. It's one thing to believe Hamburger could be a real comedian; it's quite another to place him in the thicket of losers and malcontents at Di Presa's. But even if the joke is spoiled somewhat, it's still an inspired bit of sketch comedy, which has been rare on comedy albums lately.

Around town

Baratunde Thurston joins Peter Dutton for a headline news segment tonight for the "It's Not That Late Show" at Jimmy Tingle's Off Broadway theater. . . . Pablo Francisco plays the Comedy Connection tonight and tomorrow. . . . Chance Langton and Teddy Bergeron play the Off Broadway tonight and tomorrow. . . . E.J. Murphy, Jessica Casciano, Shane Mauss, Patrick Bulger, Shane Webb, and Dan Boulger play the "Stand Up for a Good Cause" fund-raiser Monday at the Courtside Restaurant & Pub in Cambridge to benefit the Cambridge Family and Children's Services.

From Tulare Advance-Register — August 14, 2009

Comic Hamburger is an acquired taste

Funny man returns to downtown Visalia

BY JOSEPH LORD
Gannett

When he performs stand-up comedy, Neil Hamburger incessantly clears his throat in the annoying fashion of curmudgeonly grandfathers. His tuxedo is dependably disheveled, giving him the appearance of a rejected groom just awakened from a days-long, memory-wiping bender.

His repertoire consists almost exclusively of punny jokes that go something like this gem from an appearance on "Jimmy Kimmel Live":

"Why did the farmer start a punk rock band? He was tired of haulin' oats."

Rimshot, please.

Hamburger returns Friday to Visalia at The Cellar Door. He performed here in 2007 and 2008. This time, he brings the popular Comedy Central and Adult Swim comedian Tim Heidecker of the "Tim & Eric Show."

Hamburger has adopted the moniker "America's Funnyman," which could reflect only the sad state of America.

Others call him "America's Worst Comedian," and that's why he's so hilarious.

how to attend

Neil Hamburger and Tim Heidecker will perform at 9:30 p.m. Friday at The Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia. Cover for the 21-and-older show is $5.

"Essentially, I had no choice but to do stand-up," said comedian/actor/musician Gregg Turkington, who embodies Hamburger as faithfully as comedian Andy Kaufman portrayed the acerbic Tony Clifton.

"Everything else I tried I was poor at," Turkington said. "So I was sort of herded into this. I went to see this career counselor and said, 'I don't understand this, I got fired from this fast-food restaurant. I was the fry cook. They told me it was the lowest of the low.'

"The counselor said, 'Actually, there's one thing lower — stand-up comedy.' She said the pay was worse and it required less experience. She was right. It's been worse. But, you know, it's been a great career."

Turkington as Hamburger first gained notice in the early '90s on comedy albums featuring prank phone calls. Indie-rock label Drag City released Hamburger's 1996 album, "America's Funnyman," and a decade or more of they're-so-bad-they're-laughable-jokes ensued: ("Why does Kentucky Fried Chicken come in a bucket? So you have something to throw up in.")

SOUND N VISION

Neil Hamburger and Tim Heidecker will perform Friday at the Cellar Door in Visalia.

He branched out to become a talk-show guest in 2006 when MTV personality Tom Green gave him a job hosting "Poolside Chats," a feature that appeared irregularly on Green's Web site. Hamburger interviewed guests and took viewer calls in the vein of Larry King. One highlight was an amusing interview with Louisville musician Will Oldham, a fellow Drag City artist who rarely grants interviews, even faux ones.

"Poolside Chats" was short-lived, with just five episodes.

"We haven't had one of those for over a year, but there's no reason to believe we wouldn't do it again," Turkington said. "The people who watch that are freeloaders; they don't pay a nickel. There are people who have to pay for — what do you call that? — bandwidth, and you've got to line up the time for people with cameras. We do hope to go back on the air with that."

He paused to imagine what might have been.

"What really would've been great," he said, "is if somebody watched an episode of that and said, 'Neil, there's a slot opening up for a late-night host with Conan O'Brien moving and Leno and that whole scene. Why don't you take over one of these shows?' That would've been great."

San Francisco Chronicle — February 23, 2006

Nightlife

Lizzy Kate Gray

Neil Hamburger's whole package as a failure has struck a chord with audiences.

:: Neil Hamburger :: He's greasy, drunk, wears big glasses and bad suits and has no comic timing. He's not for everyone, but he's a cult hero to his fans.

Neil Hamburger takes a rather dark view of the world, but who could blame him? His car broke down on Valentine's Day. And that's the least of his problems.

"Legal problems, health problems, family problems, financial problems, emotional problems, and then, of course, the world is decaying and crumbling," Hamburger says.

But, specifically, he had car trouble.

"The whole engine dropped out; it was a Valentine from the auto mechanic who checked it six months ago," huffed Hamburger, speaking from Los Angeles in his booming tone reminiscent of a television announcer from the '50s. He was a little sketchy about the details of his mechanical troubles. "I don't actually know the make of the car; you know, these kids, these hip-hop urban kids, steal the name of the car — the hood ornament — and wear it as necklaces; it's the cool thing to do."

Was he worried that perhaps he's dealing with a stolen car?

"Well, when we bought it, the price we paid was pretty low," Hamburger mumbles, coughing a little. "And it didn't have a vehicle identification number. Those kids — it's a trend; they like to wear the vehicle identification number around their necks."

Hamburger is what some call a "cult hero," meaning that his biggest fans don't just buy his albums — they preach about him, post on his online bulletin boards (ostensibly organized by a very dedicated fan with bad spelling named Boni Jergen) and organized a convention last year called Neil Con to celebrate him. It seems that his whole package, which can be summed up as failure, has struck a chord.

But he's not for everyone. He's greasy, he's drunk, he wears big glasses and bad suits, and tells bad jokes. His humor isn't obscene (most of the time), just bad. He has no comic timing and makes very little attempt to ingratiate himself with audiences. Hamburger is a relentless tourer — he claimed to have played 399 gigs last year — and it's entirely believable when he says that people walk out on him more frequently than not.

Like Tony Clifton, Andy Kaufman's sleazy alter ego, Hamburger is a creation of another artist. But comparisons to other fabulists — James Frey, JT LeRoy — were greeted with genuine derision.

"There's a lot of garbage talk out there. I can't understand why people can't accept the show for what it is," Hamburger says. "I mean, some people think that it was Lee Harvey Oswald who shot the man in Texas, not Dick Cheney. What's next?"

— *Reyhan Harmanci*

Neil Hamburger performs two shows at the two-year anniversary of the Hemlock Tavern's "Club Chuckles" series. 9 and 11:30 p.m. Fri. $10. Hemlock Tavern, 1131 Polk St., S.F. (415) 923-0923; *www.hemlocktavern.com.*

ESSENTIALS

:: Nada Surf ::
With Rogue Wave, Inara George. Today @ The Fillmore: Two O.C.-approved bands and one chanteuse making smart pop that is only occasionally sad. **8 p.m., $18.50. 1805 Geary Blvd., S.F. (415) 346-6000. *www.thefillmore.com.***

:: Gold Chain Music Tour ::
Featuring Planet Asia, Casual of the Hieroglyphics, Rasco, Flii Stylz, DJ E-Rock. Today @ Slim's: West Coast tour from a gaggle of veteran West Coast hip-hop scene stars. **9 p.m., $20. 333 11th St., S.F. (415) 255-0333. *www.slims-sf.com.***

:: Buddy Guy ::
With Jimbo Mathus. Friday @ The Fillmore: Blues legend — with a new album out — is well worth the price of admission. **8 p.m., $35. 1805 Geary Blvd., S.F. (415) 346-6000. *www.thefillmore.com.***

:: Neil Hamburger ::
Friday @ Hemlock Tavern: He's not funny. He's really, really not funny. Neil Hamburger will perform two shows at the two-year anniversary of the Hemlock Tavern's "Club Chuckles" series with the Poontang Wranglers Sheng Wang (first show only) and Brent Weinbach (second show only). **9 and 11:30 p.m., $10. 1131 Polk St., S.F. (415) 923-0923. *www.hemlocktavern.com.***

:: Gris Gris ::
With Tomorrow's Friend, the Mantles. Friday @ Stork Club: Beloved locals Gris Gris playing straight-ahead psychedelic rock. **9:30 p.m., $5. 2330 Telegraph Ave., Oakland. (510) 444-6174. *www.storkcluboakland.com.***

:: Vinyl ::
Saturday @ 12 Galaxies. Featuring Bernie Worrell and Rondo Brothers. There's a reason why frat boys love funk so much — it's a great way to get sweaty with girls on the dance floor. **9 p.m., $15. 2565 Mission St., S.F. (415) 970-9777. *www.12galaxies.com.***

:: DJ Twitch (Optimo) ::
With Tim Sweeney (DFA) w/ Ryan Poulsen (Gun Club) and TK Disko. Saturday @ the Dark Room: For the first time in San Francisco, Glasgow's famous DJ with DFA's Mix Master. **10 p.m. $10. 60 Sixth St., S.F. (415) 531-6593.**

— *Reyhan Harmanci*

Laughs, Love and Life with Neil Hamburger

by Tom Scharpling

"Nothing of Gods, nothing of Fate. Weighty affairs will just have to wait. Nothing that's formal, nothing that's normal, no recitations to recite! Tragedy tomorrow, comedy tonight!"

- Stephen Sondheim *from "Comedy Tonight"*

"What's this world need but a good laugh - agreed? Don't you think we need it? Well, that's my job - going around making people laugh. That's what I enjoy doing - what's wrong with that?"

- Neil Hamburger *Introduction to* **America's Funnyman** *LP*

Neil loves to sign autographs - especially for the ladies.

Neil can still find time in his busy schedule to unwind at home.

Neil shows he knows which side of the bread the butter's on.

A cherished chotchke.

The author shows he knows which side of the bread the butter's on.

If laughter is good medicine, then stand-up comedians are travelling doctors, roaming from town to town, dispensing their comedic cures. Metaphor firmly in place, that means performers like Jerry Seinfeld and Bill Maher are highly-skilled specialists. Conversely, a comedian like Neil Hamburger is the guy who checks your blood pressure at Pathmark.

Armed with just his wit and an old-fashioned entertainment aesthetic, Mr. Hamburger plays 350-plus engagements a year at clubs, lounges and pizza parlors across America (not necessarily in that order). While he might be hanging for dear life onto the lowest rung of the showbiz ladder, his dedication to the profession is absolute.

His comedy might not be as perfect as that of the Jay Lenos and Tim Allens of the world. They've got their acts down to a well-timed science, drawing laughs at precise moments. Neil's jokes are more like low-grade fireworks - just as likely to draw groans as applause (and possibly take a finger). His act is of the "warts and all" variety - never perfect, but always real.

That's not to say that Neil Hamburger lives in the ghetto of Outsider Art - he is not "the Jad Fair of comedy". While the Elite dig Mr. Fair's intentions, you'd be hard pressed to get Joe Lunchpail to put on Music To Strip By after a hard day in the factory. Neil doesn't play to a specific scene. While his records are released by "indie rock" record labels, his goal is to have his comedy heard by all people. Like the title of his most recent album states, he does indeed strive to be "America's Funnyman".

(The following interview was conducted via pay telephone as Mr. Hamburger was in the middle of a U.S. tour.)

Neil on ... The Formative Years

LCD: Tell me about your early stand-up experiences.

Neil: Lots of open mikes, birthday parties, that sort of thing. There was a bit more "blue" material. That's what people wanted, and I had a real sense of desperation in those days to get the career going. Now the tides are turning again, and we may add that sort of material to the set once again.

LCD: What comedians influenced you when you were starting out?

Neil: Rich Little is great, of course...Tim Conway, Jonathan Winters. A lot of the TV sitcoms are pretty funny and have been a big influence - any of them that you can name have been a big influence on the comedy of Neil Hamburger.

Neil on ... Life on the Road

LCD: Describe a typical day in the life of Neil Hamburger.

Neil: Well, we have a show to do, so there's no time for a "typical day". Tonight we're in Carson City, which is nice. It's a big show, that's the capital of Nevada. A lot of times we take the smaller shows though, in the smaller towns. You have dinner, then you do the show, and that's pretty much it.

LCD: What is the easiest type of crowd to please, and what is the hardest type to please?

Neil: I'd say the smaller crowds are generally easier, because they can't make as much noise and try to drown you out during your routine. I like playing the nightclubs and the comedy clubs as opposed to these pizza parlors where they don't have a stage per se - you're just kinda stuck in the corner. But you never know what'll happen. It's been a great career overall.

Neil on ... Laughter and Inspiration

LCD: It's your job to make all of us laugh. Where do you turn when it's time for you to laugh?

Neil: Hmmm...have you ever seen Dorf On Golf? Tim Conway - he's real funny - I always try and keep up on his current releases. Rich Little has been an influence. Yakov Smirnoff is quite funny. And especially all of the current comedians out there. I can't keep track of their specific names because they're all so good that they're nearly interchangeable.

LCD: What is it that allows you to take things from everyday life and make them funny?

Neil: Well, you keep up on things. Whether it's current news events, or current slang - "lingo" as they call it - the movies....I try to see as many movies as I can. Performing as often as I do, which is about 350 shows a year, I rarely get the chance to work out any bugs that might hamper a routine, which means I always keep a bottle of insect repellant alongside my gin and tonic.

LCD: What's the most recent movie you've seen, and did you create any new material from the experience?

Neil: Oh yes. I saw one, the new one, oh, what is it called. Very, very exciting. And I think there could be some Oscars, the acting was tremendous. But I can't remember the name. It'll come back to me. Well, it's so popular right now, you probably know what I'm talking about...but yes, I think I'll end up with some new material from it. It's always good to keep current, on top of things.

Neil on ... The Business End of "The Business"

LCD: How did you get the title 'America's Funnyman'?

Neil: The public never actually voted on it. That was actually more of a management decision - a gimmick if you will. I think it's great though. I'm gonna keep using it. But basically it's just a gimmick. My manager has spoken to the copyright office about setting it up as a legal thing, but we haven't heard back from them.

LCD: Based on the content of your album America's Funnyman, your life seemed to be bottoming out around the time it was recorded. What was going on and how are you doing now?

Neil: You know, that album was taken from a handful of shows during a winter tour last year, and though it is very representative of my routine last year, I think the people that produced it must've used some of the more depressing segments purposely, because I get asked that question a lot.

Yes, things were tough. I was going through a painful divorce, and quite frankly, attendance at a lot of the shows was not what it could've been. But I've always been gifted with laughter, and that has seen me through some rough times. Right now I'm doing what I always do - taking the jokes out on the road and performing almost nightly. Some of the problems in my personal situation have not yet been resolved.

LCD: Why do your records come out on "indie rock" labels?

Neil: I don't really know why. But I'm glad they do, so that they can put their whole promotions department to work on just one comedian. If they had all sorts of comedians on the label, they probably wouldn't have as much time for me, or as much loyalty. This way they can really do a bang-up job. Great people.

But I like a lot of the new music. Of course, my personal taste is for Country and Western, like Kenny Rogers, Lionel Richie, Neil Diamond, those guys, that sort of thing. But I don't mind Kenny G. or some of the other new music either. Have you heard that song "Smooth Operator"? That's the sort of newer thing that I hope catches on more as a trend. I don't know who it is. And Jimmy Buffett, I guess that's not strictly "indie rock", but he's done some great records over the years. I have his cassette.

LCD: The "Top 10" list on the America's Funnyman album was censored. Why?

Neil: Right. Well, we were going for a certain audience with that record. I didn't make the decision - that was a management decision. Actually, the people who put together the record, because I just do the shows, and then other people take the tapes and edit them together, and you never know what they're gonna do.

But now if you've seen the show lately, you'll see that we let fly with an occasional R-rated zinger now and again. It just depends on where the show is. Yesterday we had an afternoon show at a junior high school assembly, so there you're gonna keep it clean - you stick to the political material or sight gags. You don't talk about personal problems or impotence or whatever it might be.

LCD: I heard a rumor that there is a Neil Hamburger television special in the works. Could you tell us more?

Neil: It was wonderful. We actually produced an hour-long TV special for national syndication. The show had all kinds of guest stars - it was kind of an old-time variety show starring myself.

It was an introduction to the public what I'm about. It featured songs and skits and routines, all kinds of things.

Unfortunately, the company in Taiwan that we contracted out to make the half-inch or three-quarter inch masters for the syndication company went bankrupt, and our master tape was taken by the Taiwanese government and sold by the bank that seized all their holdings. So we don't know where it ended up. All we know is that the show was aired in India and South Korea.

So what we're trying to do is reconstruct the show using the out takes and the early edits, but this is difficult, so we may have to film again from scratch. We still have a good script, but a lot of money was put into this and with the tape being lost, the investors are a little reluctant to do it again.

LCD: Tell me about the competitiveness of the comedy business.

Neil: Well, let me state right off that I love today's comedians. Funny, funny stuff. They're a great bunch of people, too. Very talented. But yes, sometimes you get into a situation where they will try to take your bookings. You're booked at a club or pizza parlor, you drive 400 miles to get there, and you're off the bill because some comedian with stars in his eyes has slipped the owner a fifty dollar bill for your slot. It can happen.

Neil on ... Comedy

LCD: You utilize many different styles of comedy in your act (jokes, social commentary, physical humor). What are the talents required to master each of these brands of humor, and how did you develop the skills?

Neil: You learn by doing. That's the only way. There are bound to be some bad shows along the way, until you perfect the craft. Physical humor is especially difficult to master. I've been getting more and more interested in it lately, as today's audiences seem too sophisticated sometimes for the simple joke, it just doesn't get them laughing. So you have to try something else. Pull out the eggs and the balloon animals, or whatever you come up with.

LCD: Regarding social commentary, what boundaries do you set for yourself?

Neil: The only boundary is my own lack of knowledge regarding current affairs. I'm always willing to offer social commentary if it will get a laugh.

LCD: Where do you see the future of comedy heading? Will computers be involved in comedy's future?

Neil: I hope not. If I can quote the Constitution here, I think comedy is of the people, for the people, by the people. Computers will never be able to make people laugh - they don't have the timing. I don't know. Can they program in the timing? Or the passion a comedian has for his own material? Maybe it could happen. But it shouldn't. I'd be out of a job.

Neil on ... Showbiz

LCD: How did you meet up with Art Huckman, your manager?

Neil: Huckman approached me after a show in Needles, California, and offered his services. He's Hollywood all the way. Art has worked with a lot of the greats - maybe it will rub off! He was semi-retired from the business after losing a couple of lawsuits, but he saw something in me and I am grateful. He is behind my career 100% for now. He's been my manager for 2 years now, which must be some sort of a record! Sometimes he seems a little tired.

LCD: Which performers do you consider your peers? Any "showbiz secrets" you can disclose to us about your celebrity friends?

Neil: Well, I don't like to discriminate - they're all my peers. So much great entertainment, so many comedians out there. I love playing the same club with a big-name act, like Cook E. Jarr, who I did a show with in Las Vegas, or Lorna Luft, whose act I've always admired.

Lately though, I've been playing a lot of the smaller clubs, outside of the big cities, which is fine, but it makes it hard to get the "showbiz secrets". But I'll tell you what: Jerry Van Dyke, Dick's brother, is supposed to be a great guy with a heart of gold. And here's a great story - Bert Convy, before he passed away, was known to make secret runs in the middle of the night to get chocolate shakes at McDonald's. Never even told the wife, just slipped out the back door. Wonderful!

Art Huckman met Freddie Prinze, the comedian from "Chico and the Man" just a couple of days before he died. He talked to him at a Vons Market in Century City, he was in line behind him. He called the police after the suicide, with his inside story, offered to testify. But then Art has a lot of great stories of working with celebrities, lots of secrets. Lots of secrets. For instance, he did some work for Rich Little years ago, in the 60's. He's been to Rich's house, that sort of thing. He said it was very tidy. Then there's Richard Hatch, from "Battlestar Galactica", who I met at a self-help seminar, and he was a very, very nice man. This is a great business. I have to admit, I wish my career was headed more on an uphill slope though.

LCD: Finally, to anybody starting out in the comedy business, do you have any advice?

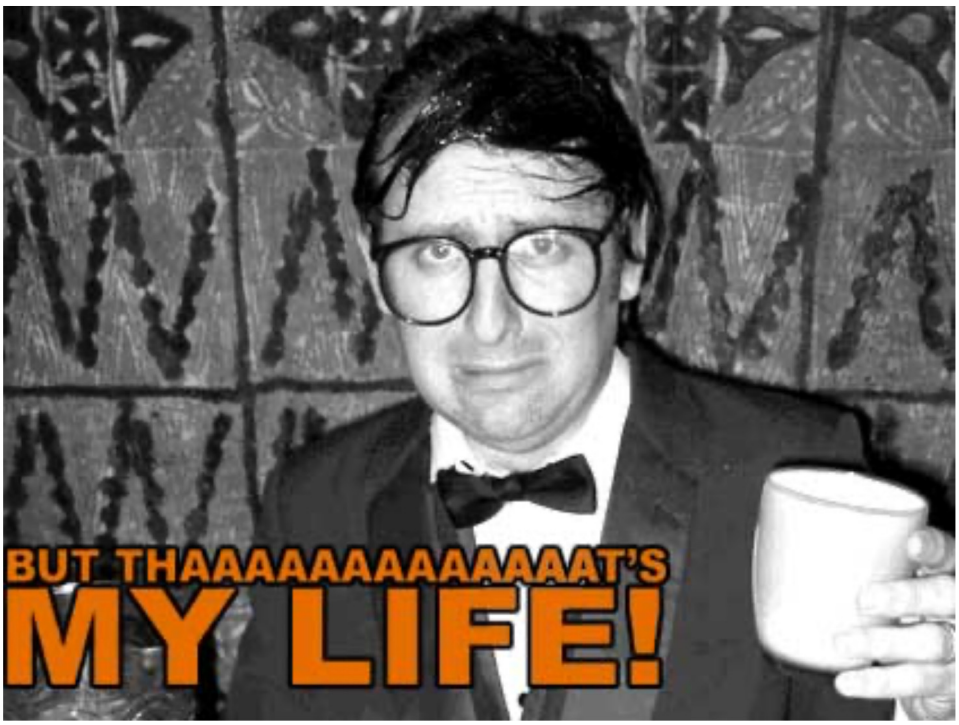
Neil: Please don't steal any more of my bookings. That is getting to be a real problem. Some of these new comedians are ruthless.

- Tom Scharpling can be heard from 8 to 11 pm on Monday nights. He credits Neil's taped Motivation Seminars for overcoming his debilitating speech impediment

ReadySet... Aesthetic 2000

https://web.archive.org/web/20080420084420/http://www.odysseyzine.com/?p=72

INTERVIEW WITH NEIL HAMBURGER



I was first exposed to your humor when I purchased your souvenir recording, "Bartender the laugh's on me!!!" from Planet Pimp records. When I received it, there was an autograph in the lower-left corner. Are there any autographed copies out there? Is it authentic?
There were some autographed copies made available for awhile, in an attempt to help sell records. I did indeed sign the first batch, but I must confess that a secretary signed a few as well, in order to keep up with the great demand. This is not as fishy as it sounds–The Beatles and Ronald Reagan are but two of the Celebrities who have been known to utilize this practice. I would have to see your record to authenticate it. But I am always happy to sign Neil Hamburger recordings and mementos at any of my live shows, so if you feel that your autograph is in error, please feel free to have me sign it again!

Planet Pimp used to be a strong supporter of your work. I haven't heard much about what they've been doing since you signed with Drag City. What happened to Sven-Erik Geddes?
Mr. Geddes has retired from the music business to concentrate on matters closer to his heart. That's a nice way of putting it.

Your newest CD, "Inside Neil Hamburger" was recorded in Australia. Did you catch Olympic Fever while you were there?
No, because I had been inoculated. But I did get the chance to perform at the new Olympic Stadium in Sydney a few months beforehand. Which is a measure of success.

Did you try any Olympic jokes on the Aussie crowds?
I did, but I guess they just don't share the world's fascination with the Olympics, because no one laughed.

Was it hard to find the pulse of Australian culture? Did the people of Australia have trouble identifying with an American comedian?
You always have a few rotten apples in any batch. The people that threw things at me do not represent the Australian people as a whole.

You've performed in Australia and Malaysia, Do you find that international crowds have a different sense of humor than your American fans?
No, there is a real similarity. People all over are tough. You can't get them to laugh as much as in the past. These are tough times. You need to really go all out nowadays to get them to smile. Which is why I bring a lot of banana peels with me when I'm on tour now.

What part of the world do you plan to visit next? Is there any particular place on earth that needs laughter the most?
I think they need it bad in these United States. Because of the problems with the election. If anyone out there has a nightclub, casino, or even spare room of your house–I am available to ease your woes (for a fee). Contact my booking agents, milliondollarperformances@neilhamburger.tvheave

One time I was in an internet chatroom and I got in an argument with someone who claimed to be a member of FRENZAL RHOMB. Did you get in any

ReadySet... Aesthetic 2000

https://web.archive.org/web/20080420084420/http://www.odysseyzine.com/?p=72

INTERVIEW WITH NEIL HAMBURGER

arguments with Frenzal Rhomb when you were on the road with them?
No, they were very nice people. We have certain alcoholic tendencies in common, which is nice to find in people. Some of their fans are a little difficult, because of their young age. Now, as you may or may not know, I have become a cartoon character in a great new Australian cartoon TV series called "God's Ugly Children", which is based on Frenzal Rhomb and their various personality disorders.

It seems that you've been featured on bills with punk rock bands.
Yes. But is that a question? I don't get your point. But yes, I've played on bills with some of the top names. The Offspring, Garbage, Silverchair. They don't get any bigger than that. But the crowds generally do not care for the humor. These kids are very serious. They can't let down their hair and LAUGH! Probably because they've shaved it all off.

Since your divorce, and perhaps before that time, you've had time to sample the road life as a single man. What is it like? Are you popular with the ladies?
I don't have time for that. Million Dollar Performances, my new management company, keeps me far too busy. Between their own problems with the IRS, and my problems with my ex-wife's lawyers, we have a lot of debt to make up for and pay off. It's very difficult.

Which motels do you prefer to stay at while you're on the road? Is there any chain of Inns that you think set a good example of quality?
I like Best Western quite a bit. Not such a fan of the Days Inn anymore, they charge you for everything… local calls, parking…they even charge you $1/day for the use of the safe they have in each room–regardless of whether or not you actually use it!

But, realistically, if I could work out some sort of endorsement deal with any of the chains, that would be great. I have something good to say about all of them. I would be willing to trade appearances at their corporate conventions or seminars, in exchange for some sort of pass from them that would give me free lodging year round. Something like that would be great. I'd be happy to give a motivational talk, something to make the executives laugh.

I imagine it's hard to stay healthy on the road. Do you work out?
No, no time for that. But I do try and play games like Yahtzee in the car, anything to keep the fingers from cramping and the mind from snapping.

On your CD, "Inside Neil Hamburger," you crack wise about N'Sync and Sporty Spice. What are some of the current trends that you're working into your act.
We keep up with the trends, that's the truth. Especially with the music, since I'm doing so many music shows now. So there are always fresh jokes about the new bands. And then other popular trends, like the whole Princess Diana death, or the Spice Girls, anything like that. I'm just sorry I was out of the country when the little Cuban boy, Elias, was having his fifteen minutes of fame. Because I think Elias jokes would have been very popular.

I wanted to catch your recent Minneapolis gig with The Champs. Did you make it to the performance? How was the crowd?
That was one of a number of shows I did recently with some of the new music groups, such as TransAm. As I recall, that went quite well, plenty of smiles, and of course, a fair bit of laughter also. But a lot of the shows are a blur. I don't understand why you missed the show, why did you?

I couldn't make it to your performance in Minneapolis because of the drive. I live in Fargo, ND. There are several comedy clubs and pizza parlours in Fargo. Do you think you'll be hitting the stage in North Dakota anytime soon?
We went through Fargo the day before, and had a delightful meal at the Olive Garden there. I wish I'd known of your interest in booking my act–I would love to perform in your town sometime. We could've set something up. Please stay in touch with my booking agents, Million Dollar Performances, of Fresno, California. You can reach them at milliondollarperformances@neilhamburger.tvheaven.com or at neilhamburger@fresnomail.com I love to play the pizza parlors, comedy clubs, WHATEVER! Anything. Even a car wash. As long as the money–and the LAUGHS–are there.

I noticed that on October 29 you played the House of Blues in Hollywood California. Did you bring down the house?
That was a prestigious show, I'm glad you asked. The audience was pretty tough that night. But some of the Hollywood "VIP" type of people who were there were very receptive, which made up for it.

How has your relationship been with your booking agency, MILLION DOLLAR PERFORMANCES. Do they deal with any other famous acts?
They have in the past. But now they've stripped down their roster. (Not literally.) And so now they mainly concentrate on me, and a few others. Some of the old r&b groups, that are now without any income. They had a version of the Platters for awhile, until the real Platters sued to stop them.

It seems that most of your performances are scheduled with musical acts. Do you wish that you would get more bookings on "comedy showcases?"
The musicians are nicer people than the comedians. The comedians will stab you in the back. I don't always like being around those people.

Does performing with punk rock bands give you any new material?
Yes, because of the freshness of their approach. Screaming and yelling like that, and they get paid for it. Amazing!

Many other famous comedians such as Whoopi Goldberg and Robin Williams do charity performances such as Comic Relief. Do you think you'll be doing charity work anytime soon?
If the money is there–sure!

ReadySet... Aesthetic 2000
https://web.archive.org/web/20080420084420/http://www.odysseyzine.com/?p=72

INTERVIEW WITH NEIL HAMBURGER

I noticed that Ipecac Recordings rereleased your famous appearance on "Great Phone Calls." Do you think that will win many more fans for Neil Hamburger?
I don't think that showed me in the best light. But you never know.

Do you think that you'll record any more funny phone calls?
I didn't record those ones in the first place. Someone was tapping my phone!

With the Presidential election in full swing, do you find yourself doing a lot of political jokes?
Yes, because you have to keep up to date. Or the audience walks out on you.

Which Presidential candidate would provide America with the most laughs? George Bush, Pat Buchanan, Al Gore, or Ralph Nader?
It's up to the comedian to provide the laughs. We can make jokes about any of them, about any subject. I don't want to speculate on what might happen if these Presidents started cutting into our territory. That could ruin my career.

When the World's funnyman hits the stage, what can the audience do to bring out the best of Neil Hamburger?
If the laughs are there, I can become quite funny.

Thank you. I hope that this will help your magazine to sell more copies. Let me know when you receive this because of the problem with the electronic transmission. The vote-counting-machines are all broken in Florida; perhaps the e-mail-sending machines are also broken. It's usually a chain reaction with techology. That's why all those people died.

Thank you for LAUGHING,
NEIL HAMBURGER

Originally published in ReadySet… Aesthetic.

Fifteen Questions Interview with Neil Hamburger Crying on the Inside

https://www.15questions.net/interview/fifteen-questions-neil-hamburger/page-1/

When did you start writing/producing music - and what or who were your early passions and influences? What is it about music and/or sound that drew you to it?

I mainly make spoken-word, comedy records, but we've had songs on the records since the very beginning. I think the first one I recorded was called "She Sits Among The Cabbages And Peas". You know, the key to success is being a well-rounded entertainer. Jokes are my trade, but it can't hurt to have a little song-and-dance up the sleeve as well. Jerry Lewis opened all his shows with a song. And conversely, the great singers would always throw in a joke or two in the midst of their set. But more recently I've tried to steer clear from songs that might be categorized as a "novelty" and instead find numbers that reflect some of the sadder themes touched upon in the act.

For most artists, originality is first preceded by a phase of learning and, often, emulating others. How would you describe your own development as an artist and the transition towards your own voice? What is the relationship between copying, learning and your own creativity?

It's good to absorb the commitment to entertain, the honest commitment to putting on a quality show that the greats all had. But for god's sake, you cannot pinch the specifics of their styles. That's poisonous! You need to figure out what your personal point of view is, and then throw it up onto the stage every night.

What were your main compositional- and production-challenges in the beginning and how have they changed over time?

I cannot play the piano. But I know what I like. No one is going to convince me to cover a Foghat song. I had a lot of discussions with my producer on Still Dwelling, Erik Paparozzi, to figure out how we could make the best record that we could make. He can play anything! Just to add some additional "spice" to the mix, we brought in some pals to throw in their two cents, musically speaking. We contacted the folks that were right for these particular songs. Obviously, you don't want to bring in druggies. Or someone with a bad flu.

What was your first studio like? How and for what reasons has your set-up evolved over the years and what are currently some of the most important pieces of gear for you?

I don't have a studio. I have stayed in motel or hotel rooms that are advertised as "studios" but it's just another name for a single, solitary room with a bed and perhaps a desk. I have my own microphone that I travel with, and we used it on this record too. It was made by the Sennheiser people. I bought it in Australia several years ago in the midst of a long run of shows at the Portland Hotel in Melbourne. I broke my other microphone dropping it on the floor in disgust with the way that particular night was going.

How do you make use of technology? In terms of the feedback mechanism between technology and creativity, what do humans excel at, what do machines excel at?

Humans excel at telling jokes and singing; machines excel at perhaps documenting that. It's crazy when these "dance music" assholes use their stupid laptop computer to do the lead vocals. What a nightmare sound that is! People complain that I might not be on the level of a Bing Crosby or Rudy Vallee on the vocals, but I'll tell you, at least I'm making an effort to produce a relatable sound. The last thing I want to hear is some dumb computer voice singing about how to live my life.

Production tools, from instruments to complex software environments, contribute to the compositional process. How does this manifest itself in your work? Can you describe the co-authorship between yourself and your tools?

If the computer tools can record what's going on, I salute them. Especially if they can do it in a way that's easy and imperceptible. But there was plenty of great music before those tools appeared. They add as much to the sound as a digital display on an oven adds to a great casserole. As for the musical instruments—we used a lot of them on this record; trombones, trumpets, cellos, violins, vibraphone, you name it! Heavy to carry around, but well worth it. The musicians really put themselves into what they play, and their personality shines through. And it's a pleasure to spend time around these people. Computers—half the time I'm ready to throw them into the trash.

Collaborations can take on many forms. What role do they play in your approach and what are your preferred ways of engaging with other creatives through, for example, file sharing, jamming or just talking about ideas?

I loved working with Erik Paparozzi on this record. We were on the same page about what we wanted, and what we wanted to avoid. I would not want to work with a jerk; like the guys from Papa Roach, or Gene Simmons, or some of the slovenly no-

Fifteen Questions Interview with Neil Hamburger Crying on the Inside

https://www.15questions.net/interview/fifteen-questions-neil-hamburger/page-1/

name rockers that have approached me over the years...

Could you take us through a day in your life, from a possible morning routine through to your work? Do you have a fixed schedule? How do music and other aspects of your life feed back into each other - do you separate them or instead try to make them blend seamlessly?

I have a lot of shows to do. On the road, all the time. We recorded this record in a number of studios worldwide, but mostly in Los Angeles and Las Vegas. I generally skip breakfast. Or would eat a handful of fruit. Mostly it's a lot of driving. Definitely the mood of this type of lifestyle infected the vocal performance on a lot of those songs.

Could you describe your creative process on the basis of a piece or album that's particularly dear to you, please? Where did the ideas come from, how were they transformed in your mind, what did you start with and how do you refine these beginnings into the finished work of art?

We did some songs where we tried to bring something new to them. Mainly you just imagine what you would personally want to hear, and then try to make it happen. Having the best musicians in town certainly helps. You toss out an idea to them, and generally they'll come back at you with an even better one. I had a thought one night as I was about to go to sleep, that personally, I would love to hear a trio of Jack Black, Mike Patton, and myself, perform "Everything's Alright" from "Jesus Christ Superstar". That's the type of recording I think the world could use more of.

The next day I asked these gentlemen about it, and they were willing to take part. In a very short time, Erik had put together a basic track, which we sent off to the United Kingdom to the incomparable musical genius Rabbit Bundrick to work on further. And then over a series of additional sessions with additional musicians and vocalists back here in the United States, the track was eventually completed to everyone's satisfaction. It is very satisfying to see something go from a fantasy to a reality in a short span of time. Ask the astronauts—anyone involved with NASA or who has walked on the moon. They'll tell you

There are many descriptions of the ideal state of mind for being creative. What is it like for you? What supports this ideal state of mind and what are distractions? Are there strategies to enter into this state more easily?

The best time is always going to be when you are in warm water. Even just washing the dishes. You just have to have paper nearby to write the ideas down, and the worry there is that it will get wet and the ink will blur.

How is playing live and writing music in the studio connected? What do you achieve and draw from each experience personally? How do you see the relationship between improvisation and composition in this regard?

It's great to have some inspiration. A live audience will do that for you. In the studio, for a few of the tracks on this record, we brought in a little group of people, friends of ours, to be our audience, in the hopes that it would liven things up, as far as the mood. You don't want to be singing to a brick wall, where there's no give and take going on.

How do you see the relationship between the 'sound' aspects of music and the 'composition' aspects? How do you work with sound and timbre to meet certain production ideas and in which way can certain sounds already take on compositional qualities?

Well, you have to do the best you can with what you are given. If we knew we would have access to certain sounds and instruments and musicians, I think that would be an inspiration. You are going to have better ideas knowing you have a Rabbit Bundrick or a Petra Haden or a Probyn Gregory behind you to carry them out, than if all you have at your disposal is some dumb hippie with a fife.

Our sense of hearing shares intriguing connections to other senses. From your experience, what are some of the most inspiring overlaps between different senses - and what do they tell us about the way our senses work? What happens to sound at its outermost borders?

If you have a song about the troubles that one is facing in life, palpable anxiety and nausea can lead to a great vocal performance. I would not want to sing a song about a fun dance party if I felt I was about to throw up. It would come out very unconvincing!

Art can be a purpose in its own right, but it can also directly feed back into everyday life, take on a social and political role and lead to more engagement. Can you describe your approach to art and being an artist?

No, but I can tell you that there's a lot of art in this new record, and that we were not screwing around.

It is remarkable, in a way, that we have arrived in the 21st century with the basic concept of music still intact. Do you have a vision of music, an idea of what music could be beyond its current form?

IS it still intact? I'm hearing a lot of very sterile, unpleasant music that is really debilitating to have to listen to. I think we would all welcome a return to the era where you had a singer sincerely attempting to connect to the lyrics of a song, for better or for worse. The last thing I want to see is some drug-fucked crumb-bum jumping up onto a table and shaking his fool ass around while what sounds like a computer glitch blares out over an endless sea of losers. Or these singers who approach singing like some sort of athletic contest.

AV Club, 2001

https://web.archive.org/web/20010423023910/http://www.theavclub.com/avclub3511/avfeature3511.html

The Onion: How's it going?

Neil Hamburger: Oh, pretty good. We've got the *Match Game* going on in the background, on the TV. It's sort of an old favorite that I wish they'd bring back, because I think I could probably be a panelist. So I'm kind of taking a look at that. My show got canceled here tonight.

O: It seems like there's been a rash of cancellations of your shows recently.

NH: We've had some problems, yes. But we're hoping that my new management will get it together. I don't want to make any predictions, but we need things to run smoother.

O: Have you been approached to appear on the new *Hollywood Squares* yet?

NH: Well, I didn't know that they had a new one. Is Peter Marshall still involved?

O: I think Peter Marshall might be dead. [He's not. --ed.] Whoopi Goldberg is the star of the new one. They also have a new version of *The Gong Show* on the Game Show Network now.

NH: I don't think I'd really fit in on that. *The Gong Show* seems more geared toward amateurs, and, you know, I've performed at some of the top clubs. But *Hollywood Squares* is something I should probably get my management to look into.

O: How long have you been performing, anyway?

NH: Well, we're getting into the 15-year range now, and we're hoping that the next 15 will be better, but, you know, we take what we can get.

O: It sounds like you got in right at the height of the comedy boom.

NH: I guess so. But it certainly didn't seem like that. There were a lot of problems initially, but we're ironing them out now and we're looking forward to a great 1999.

O: How have things changed since you started in the business?

NH: I think back then, audiences were a lot more polite. Now you've got a lot of people who'll just talk through the entire set.

O: How do you deal with hecklers?

NH: Well, you just plug on. When you're making records, you just hope that they'll edit it off the tape, and that's the best way to deal with them, for posterity's sake. But when you're faced with them in the moment, you just have to thank the Lord that they don't have microphones, too. It's impossible to keep up with them, anyway, and you can't really be nasty or you won't get invited back for another booking.

O: Do you have any zingers that you like to use when confronted with hecklers?

NH: Well, I did have some of those, but they tended to get me into trouble because some of these people are violent. A lot of times you're performing in more alcohol-oriented venues, so we keep the zingers to ourselves and hope for a violence-free show.

O: You recorded your last album in Malaysia. What was that experience like?

NH: I haven't actually heard this album yet, but it was not the best audience that I've had. I think it's just that people there are too preoccupied with their problems, politically, to be able to really relax and enjoy the show. And, you know, they don't speak English, so that's another problem, since these jokes tend to do pretty well with an English-speaking audience. If not for that, I think I would have really brought the house down and had a really great time. But it's a beautiful country, and people are people wherever they are, and people love to laugh. It was a great experience.

O: Well, they say that comedy transcends all language barriers. Have you found that to be the case in all your international travels?

NH: I've found things to be pretty much the same in terms of the audience's reaction. But I can't say that it's always been transcending boundaries, generally.

O: On the Malaysia album, you had sort of a falling-out with your manager, Art Huckman. What was that all about?

NH: Well, I wouldn't call it a falling-out, exactly. We're not working together. I have this new management, and they don't have as much of a hands-on approach as Art did. Art comes from a long showbiz tradition. As a matter of fact, he handled the estate sale of the late McLean Stevenson recently. He passed on and Art got to handle a lot of his stuff. Not the awards or anything, but Art got to handle his clothing and some of the furniture, some of the things the family didn't want. Art got to handle that stuff, and I think that was fairly lucrative for him. Art was a great man and I'm hoping we can work with him again, but for now we've got this new team, and they don't have as much of a hands-on approach, which may be better. Because Art had a lot of enemies in the business, as well as a lot of friends. But we just keep on going, because this is going to be a great year.

O: Some of your humor revolves around swinging and stuff of that sort. Did you ever go through a sexually experimental phase in your life?

"A lot of this rap music is based on comedy routines, so in that sense, I worry that people will turn more to rap music and less to comedy, which would be bad."

NH: Well, you do want to keep up with things--trends and things, so your routine doesn't get stale. At the time, Art Huckman seemed to think that the swinging market was a group that we could market the act to. We had some bookings in that type of venue, and we sometimes pointed routines in that direction. But naturally, I tend to be more of a family man, and more recently, I've chosen to be alone. So that's not something that I have a lot of expertise in. But I can certainly tell a good joke about it.

O: On your last album, you did a parody of Snoop Doggy Dogg. Are you a big fan of rap music?

NH: Well, that was something that my daughter was listening to. It wasn't really something that I really had any personal experience with. But a lot of this rap music is based on comedy routines, so in that sense, I worry that people will turn more to rap music and less to comedy, which would be bad. You certainly don't want your customers to go elsewhere, or you'll be out of a job. I would hope that a lot of this rap music will die out so it won't take away a lot of my audience. So I'll just leave it at that.

O: You also do a lot of material about your ex-wife. How has she reacted to you doing material about your lives together?

NH: Restraining orders. That would be my one-word answer to that. You know, she never really appreciated a lot of the jokes before we were divorced, and now that we are divorced, her sense of humor has really evaporated. Hmmm. Unfortunately, I'm unable to perform in the Los Angeles area because of the subpoenas and legal papers, but, you know, a lot of this can help with the material. I got a lot of new jokes out of it. And as long as I can perform them in places like Kansas, you know, it's not like the guy at the pizza place is going to tell my wife or anything.

O: So, would you say that being an entertainer put a strain on your marriage?

NH: Yeah. Well, not for me, because I can perform all year, but some of these people, some of these wives or whatever, they expect more out of you. I felt that I did a good job, but she felt that I didn't.

O: On your new album, you talk about being depressed and having suicidal thoughts. Have you ever tried Prozac?

NH: Well, I haven't tried Prozac, per se, but possibly I've tried it in a generic form. Because, you know, a lot of these generic drugs, they save you a lot of money, and for the most part they're just as good. You know, I've read some articles about this. It's not like the canned peas, where the quality isn't there with the store brand and you want to stick with the Green Giant. I actually bring a lot of canned foods on tour, because sometimes you can't eat until after a show, and in smaller towns, things shut down. So I carry with me an electric hot plate and some utensils. You have a lot more control over the direction of your life if you carry these things.

O: Have you ever had a religious experience?

NH: Well, you know, that's something that I'd like to deal with on my next album. It's gonna be more religious in nature, and it's going to be called *Laugh Out Lord*. It has to deal more with the religious thoughts and beliefs I have that I thought maybe I should do something with. So why not cash in and make a record out of it? We did this X-rated humor, and we brought in some people with that, but we're still looking for a break. You know, this is a very Christian country.

NH: Well, I hope they can come along. This is why I have a new manager. Because Art, with his AA and everything, didn't have the time to do the studies where we find out if people would prefer the Christian humor to the more adult humor. We'll go in that direction. My thing is to make people laugh. The details don't matter as long as I'm free to tell my jokes. You can take a joke about a hooker and turn it into a joke about Jesus, just by changing a few words. But the intent is there, which is to ease people's burden with laughter. I've been in this business for a long time, and I could conceivably take the whole *Raw Hamburger* album and rewrite it--just take a few words out here and there and make it into a Christian album.

O: Or you could just get somebody to remix your last few albums.

NH: Then I wouldn't even have to record them. You know, if the record company thinks that would work, then I'm all for it.

O: You've toured extensively, so you must have come into contact with a number of your fans. How would you describe the Hamburger demographic?

NH: Well, it's small. There aren't many of these people. They aren't necessarily short. You'd be surprised. I'd say they're people that love to laugh. Of course, we all do, so conceivably this demographic could include everyone. Because of the type of bookings I've had recently, I'd say it tends to be people that enjoy pizza. We have a lot of bookings in pizza parlors, and that's good, because, you know, you get a pizza in addition to your fee, and sometimes, if they've screwed up an order, you get another pizza for free, as well. Because they'll throw it away otherwise.

O: Have you ever considered giving up stand-up comedy?

NH: Well, I've considered it, but it's not really something that I have any choice about. I just keep plugging along.

O: Have you always known that you wanted to be a stand-up comic?

NH: I can't say that. No. But I knew that I was fated to do that when my psychiatrist suggested I try it as a form of therapy. You know, when you've got two things that come together like that, you need to go for it.

O: A lot of your comedy seems therapeutic in nature. Would you agree with the theory that all comedy comes from deep emotional pain?

NH: Hmmm... Well, I don't really want to comment on that, because these younger comedians out there, they try to take your ideas and run with them. I just don't want to give anything away. I mean, I could give you my opinions on that and tell some jokes of my own, and then, before you know it, I'm out of another booking.

O: Are you worried about people stealing your material?

NH: Well, you know, they steal your material, they steal your bookings, and they steal the limelight. And a lot of these people, you know, their ideas don't come out of nowhere. And I recognize a lot of these people. I see them in the audience at my shows, or maybe buying my records over the counter. But you can't be too careful. I wish it weren't like that.

O: Have you thought of copyrighting your jokes?

NH: Yeah, we copyright everything. Which is part of the problem, part of the reason that right now I'm living out of a storage locker. You've got the copyright attorneys, you've got the divorce attorneys, and you've got the managers, and they all want a piece of the pie, and when the piece of the pie is literally a piece of pie, then there's

not that much to go around. I'm just glad that we've got the records, and they could be hits. So if you're in a position to tell people to buy this record, that would be great. I could live with that. This is a good show, and there's no reason we couldn't be doing better.

O: Is there any sort of story behind how you got your "That's my life!" catch phrase?

NH: I had noticed that all the top comedians had their own original catch phrases, so I tried to come up with one of my own. Most of the good ones were already taken, but mine wasn't, so that's the one we stuck with. You know, sometimes it doesn't go over so well, but thatttt's my life!

O: What were you like in high school?

NH: That was a problematic period for me, but you just keep plugging away. In a way, it was because of all the taunts I received in high school that I built up the strength to do what I do on stage.

O: Have you ever considered going into film?

NH: Of course. You know, I've got more than a few catch phrases. "That's my life," I think would make a good film. And you could see how a film like that would come together in a heartbeat. My dream would actually be to have one of these catch phrases made into a film, and maybe build up a bigger reputation.

O: How about television?

"In a way, it was because of all the taunts I received in high school that I built up the strength to do what I do on stage."

NH: Well, we had a TV special that we aired. I don't know if you saw that. We had some problems with it. It aired... Well, it never really aired. What happened was, we spent a lot of money on it. It was an inheritance that my wife had gotten [while] we were married. We spent quite a bit of money on the guest stars and on the sound stage, and we filmed a pilot for a variety hour, which I think could have done quite well. But we sent the tapes out to get duplicated at this place to save some money, and the company went bankrupt. And it turns out that they weren't even doing it themselves; they were sending these tapes off to Taiwan. They were in Taiwan, we didn't have any sort of back-up copy, and somehow it ended up airing in Korea. And we tried to piece together a new version of the special using cutting-room material and outtakes, but it didn't really have the same zing.

O: With all the touring you've done, what is your favorite place to play?

NH: Well, you don't want to single one out. They're all great. I guess I'd have to say that my favorite is... If you want to say the city you're in for this interview, you know... If you want to fix it, you know, rewind the tape or whatever.

O: Well, we're distributed in different cities and online, so we could just edit the interview differently for each city. You know, we're in Chicago, Denver, Madison, Boulder, Milwaukee...

NH: Well, those are all great cities. I haven't been able to get a booking in some of those cities, but I've played some of the outlying areas, and a lot of the outlying areas are great. A lot of the people who live in the outlying areas live there because they can't afford to live in the cities. So, we're all in the same boat. So, you know, buy my record.

Neil Hamburger, America's Funnyman

What's the best thing you listened to in 2012?

As a pre-show ritual, generally I will listen to selections from Bow Wow Wow's album *See Jungle! See Jungle!* before stepping on stage. It's a cheerful record, and has been the only thing that can put me in the correct mood to entertain during these past few years.

What's the best movie you saw in 2012?

You can't argue with the Tim And Eric's Billion Dollar Movie. All those who saw it will forever be haunted by the scene set in the "gimmick restaurant" Inbreadables.

What's the best TV show you watched in 2012?

Late one night while flipping channels in my motel room, I stumbled upon a TV show masquerading as a "movie," starring Jennifer Love Hewitt as Audrey Hepburn. Her performance reminded me of a child sneaking into her mother's closet while her parents were out, and playing dress-up in her mother's clothes while talking in an infantile "high society" accent.

The Gothamist, AUGUST 18, 2006

https://gothamist.com/arts-entertainment/neil-hamburger-comedian#more

Neil Hamburger has been touring the country 365 days out of the year every week for over fifteen years. During that time he's released seven albums, two DVDs, and made countless fans. He's been in Amway, made his own brand of fruit cocktail, and performed in Malaysia in front of an audience of non-English speakers. He'd be a household name if it weren't for his money-sucking ex-wife.

How are you?

We've had a few setbacks, but the show keeps on going on. It's all you can really do.

What sort of setbacks?

Mostly car difficulties, a couple cancellations, and spoiled food. Same old set backs we had last week and the week before that.

What sort of car do you drive when you're on tour?

It's dented, let me put it that way. Not one of the ones you've seen advertised on the TV. I'll tell you what, I've got an idea for a network that I think I could profit on. Maybe, if you have some money to invest we could do this as a partnership. What I'd like to do is hire somebody, maybe a student or something, to video tape all the car advertisements that you see on TV, archive them all, and then, twenty years later, start a new channel that shows all of these old car advertisements and then people who can only afford twenty year old cars can check out the various features of these cars. What do you think?

Sounds good. It's like the Home Shopping Network.

But for the poverty stricken. The type of car that I might be buying at the point, like an '85 Rabbit.

Have you ever bought something off TV?

No, I haven't. My credit cards have all been seized and that sort of thing. My ex-wife used to spend a lot of time on the Home Shopping Network and bought quite a few of those exercise machines. She was the one that had the real income, so who was I to complain?

Did she buy that belt that works out your abs through electrocution?

I wish she'd buy something that electrocutes. Maybe that'd keep her from taking me to court every couple of weeks.

Are you the one that usually drives the car or have you got someone else with you?

Oh yeah, I have a whole team of drivers. Forty different drivers. Limo guys. No, it's just me. I'm the only one there. I sometimes have management with me, but, let's face it, times are changing. In the old days you'd have a manager who would be by your side, guide your career along, and make sure that when you got to the venue there was a cup of water waiting for you. Now I'm managed by this company that operates completely through automation. I've never even met these people. They're just a series of computer programs. They don't send anyone on the road with me. They just print out these documents that I'm supposed to put in an envelop along with the money from each night's show. It's a cold life. The manager used to sympathies with me after a show didn't go well or if a booking got canceled, but now it's these slips of papers that you put in the mail.

What happened to your old manager, Art

Huckman?

He stormed off during a show in Malaysia. I guess he felt that I wasn't putting on a good show. They made a Hollywood movie based on the whole incident. In the movie he went off to be with some local women, but, unfortunately, these movies distort the reality of the situation, which was that he was just upset with me. He went on to run this business in Las Vegas that would sell off the contents of storage lockers when people couldn't make their payments. He was a broker for that sort of thing. He keeps his hand in show business to an extent. I've been trying to get him back, but with no luck. I'm stuck with this Million Dollar Performances outfit. I never talk to anyone there. If I get a call from there it's just a computerized voice.

A lot of telemarketing is computerized now too.

It's trickled down to comedy management. I don't think these people guide my career properly and there's no one to tell when my career goes well. I've been doing these Tomgreen.com Internet broadcasts. I think I've done four of them. I put in a call to my management to let them know the good news and I had to leave my voice on some voice recognition system. I guess somebody transcribes these things. There's no real joy in sharing career highlights with robots.

Was it the robots that had arranged for Morgan Murphy to open for you or was it you who picked her out?

No, that was my idea. Some comedy that would be very good for the audience rather than these degenerate rock and roll bands that usually open the show. They're just absolutely filthy human beings. It's as if Pigpen from the old Peanuts cartoon was cloned five times and started playing awful music. I was hoping to do something a little different and bring some class to the bill. It's going to be a miniature tour in the midst of my full tour, which is going on currently.

What do you usually listen to in the car during long drives?

It's mostly these thoughts that are bouncing around my head. I just wish there was a volume knob on the side of my head to turn these things down. You're talking about some depressing sometimes-dismaying thoughts that basically pull any good feelings that you have from the show before right out of you, like an old rug. A lot of self-criticism, theories about what my ex-wife is doing sexually, and thoughts about the success of other comedians. These thoughts just keep bouncing around, getting louder and louder. That's mainly what I listen to. That, or this little transistor radio I got in a ninety-nine cent only store in Hollywood. It doesn't work too well, but it's got those little earphones that are about half the size of a dime that you jam directly into your eardrum. Sometimes I can pick up a station, and that helps block out some of these negative thoughts. The only problem is that the battery runs out on ya. I'm on such a tight leash financially that I can't afford to keep buying these double a batteries.

Are you able to keep up with current events?

I do, because I need to write these jokes. Let's face it, some of these young kids don't get jokes about Anwar Sadat and that sort of thing. You want to keep things up to date and see what's going on in the world. Sometimes, if you go to these trashcans in the rest areas, you can find some of these USA today papers and that's where I get a lot of the information. Some of the jokes come directly out of that paper.

People put out their cars at car washes. That's another good place. They put out their cars and sometimes you find pennies, newspapers, or cassette tapes. One of the favorite cassette tapes that I used to listen when the cassette machine was still working came from one of these car was

trashcans. You can find all sorts of things. I found an old blanket that we used for a while. It's an unheralded resource that you might want to tell your readers about.

Do you have any of the motivational tapes from your days in Amway?

I don't have any of that any more. That was at a time where I was trying to pick up a few extra dollars and, at that point, I was still married. I had a wife to support, although she had this inheritance. That's where we were very different people: she could use this inheritance to buy herself nice things and insisted that I use my own money to by myself anything and to pay my share of the rent, food, and all those sort of things. That created some strife. Amway, I thought, would be a good way to pick up some extra money if I did some speeches at their conventions. Eventually I ended up trying to sell some of their products after my shows. I have a merchandise booth set up to sell these Nail Hamburger t-shirts, CDs, and we got a new DVD coming out in about nineteen days. We've also got Neil Hamburger patches, in case you want to sow one of these things to your jacket or whatever. At one point, we also had Amway carpet cleaners, shampoos, and dishwasher liquids. For some people, it was convenient to buy a Neil Hamburger CD and also pick up some laundry detergent. Others just thought it was ridiculous and eventually I got caught up on some of the payments with that and the Amway people lost interest in me as a motivational speaker at some of their sales gatherings in Michigan and the Great Lakes area. The whole thing fell apart.

I got in with canned soup people and was selling canned soup at the shows. I got a good deal on that. Then I came up with my own brand of fruit cocktail, Neil Hamburger Brand Fruit Cocktail. We were selling cans of that and doing really well, but the company that was manufacturing this stuff had some problems because they had complaints about the fruit cocktail and they no longer wanted to make it to our specifications. That was the end of that.

What sort of fruit was in it?

Some of the cheaper fruits that we could get and still make a profit. This was a product that we got into a few shops, but we were selling it at shows for the main part. Sometimes I'd sell at truck stops, we had Stuckey's on board for a while. We had grapes, Maraschino cherries, pineapple, corn, carrots, apples, pear, and a sugar sauce.

Were you personally a fan of this product?

That's what you have to eat if you're in this business. You probably talked to some of these more expensive type comedians. I can see why those guys are so happy-go-lucky onstage and laughing along at their own jokes. When you've got a million dollars in the bank you can afford to do that. When you're out here struggling and, you know, I'm not playing the nicest clubs. Some of these places are real filth holes, some of these comedy club owners are real filth hole people, and some of the other comedians you encounter on the road aren't so nice either. You have to keep your optimism up and the only way you can do that is through a good diet. I stopped eating a lot of the junk food that was killing me some years ago after a series of ulcers. The ulcers were eating through the stomach lining and into the spinal column. They were eating into up my skin. I had blotches and flakes. I was put on a bland diet. I ate a lot of bread and that sort of thing, but that wasn't helping until I switched to the fruit cocktail. It was the best of any brand. You've got your fruit group, the sugars that you need to keep you going, carbohydrates, which were in the maraschino cherries, vegetables, and the protein in some of these fruits. There's trace amounts of protein in the whole thing. It keeps you

going and you never get sick if that's all you eat. It's when you start slipping and eating all of these Mounds, Almond Joys, and that sort of thing that you have end up having to get your leg amputated from God knows what. I'd recommend this for weight loss too.

What do you think of 7-11's P'EatZZa™ sandwich? It's two slices of cold pizza, cold cuts, and lettuce.

That's some that A, I can't afford, and B, would bring back all of these ulcers. I do eat at 7-11 occasionally, but that's just to get the fruit cocktail from them. The best thing to do is to get a case of this stuff and keep it in the trunk of your car. That way, you don't have to keep looking for it. I used to waste an hour a day going to supermarkets to compare prices and trying to get the best price for a can of this stuff. Now I just carry a case of this stuff in the trunk and a good solid can opener. I can literally eat it while I'm driving. Sometimes I'll treat myself. Some of my fans are the best people you'll ever meet. They slip me ten-dollar gift certificates for the Olive Garden.

Mainly, I stick to the regimen. I don't have time for a pizza sandwich. That sounds like something you'd use as a prop in a show. You step on that thing and slide half way across the stage, break your collarbone, and the crowd goes wild.

Another thing on the market is a cheeseburger that uses Krispy Kreme doughnuts instead of buns.

I've heard about that one too. It's something I'd like to give a chance, but, with some of my health problems, I'm pretty fragile physically and emotionally. You get on a routine and eat something like that and, enticing as it is, you'll end up crying in the corner of the room scratching at the walls. You got to watch out for that. There are obviously a lot of chemicals in that thing to make it good. What is it really? It's just a big blob of flour, some color, and maybe some dirt for fiber. It's not really something you'd want to eat, unless you're an ant.

With all of the driving that you do, have you had your fair share of road kill?

No, I've been pretty good about avoiding those things. The front bumper on my car is gone. It was stolen in New York City. I think these hip-hop bands wear these things around their necks as some sort of status symbol. If I hit one of these animals it's going to go through the radiator and into my lap. I'm a pretty careful driver. If you're going to be driving seven hundred miles a day on average for fifteen years, you're going to get pretty good.

We've had a few fender benders and that sort of thing. So many flat tires I can't even tell you. We but a lot of these re-treaded tires and we're trying to re-think that. It's certainly cheap, but they don't last. I got some tires in my recent shows in the San Diego area. I found this place and got some 1995 tires and filled the passenger side seat of my car with these things. I used to use that as a place to sleep, but I managed to get some of these Styrofoam from these computer boxes and lie across them. There's sort of a well you're sinking into. I've got thing going and the tires in the back seat. I bought eight of these things. I'm tired of breaking down in the middle of nowhere with no tire. Then I get charged $89.99 for a tire. Those people can go to hell. I'm covered for the next eight flat tires. I've got an old air pump to pump these things up. Really, this act is just getting better and better. We don't have the RV full of assholes that Dave Cook travels around in, but maybe some day.

I'd like to get your opinion on many of the hot button issues of the day. What do you think of global warming?

It's pretty hot, I'll tell you that. I woke up this morning in a sweat. To me, that's a sign that

something's gone wrong around here. I've been trying to make a difference. I've brushed my teeth a lot less and that type of thing. I stole a plastic cup from one of these venues and now I use that to drink water out of. You fill it up at the sink of one of these service stations rather than buying expensive bottled water, which is depleting the planet of water. Crystal Geyser, Perrier, and people like that should be ashamed that they're scooping this water out of the streams and adding to the pollution. I just fill my cup with the water that you get out of these sinks. Anything you can do to help I think you have to do. I'd gladly give some money to help out. I don't a refrigerator, so I'm not creating a problem that way. I don't smoke cigarettes and I'm not one of these guys that's littering all over Antarctica, the North Pole, and that type of thing. I tend to throw the trash in the back seat of my car and get on with the day. There are little things you can do that'll make a real difference. And you should because, let's face it, last winter I nearly froze to death sleeping in my car. This summer, I'm waking up and the heat from my body and the air melted the Styrofoam and I had to get another piece. The winters are getting colder, the summers are getting hotter, and everything's out of control. It's a matter of time before we're all dead and that's not something you want to put on your resume.

How would you have helped the victims of Hurricane Katrina?

I'd probably stop it from happening, if I had the opportunity. Put a brick wall or something to keep them from being hit by it. I'd do a benefit show for them if anyone asked, but, of course no one does ask. Getting these shows is getting tougher and tougher. We keep busy, but we're trying to book these shows for 2010 and they all have this wait and see attitude. We need to book it in advance because you've got these up and comers coming and if you don't lock in the dates one these young guys is going to come out there with his swagger and take these dates. While there's a little bit of a spotlight I'd like to get these dates locked up. I'd like to get them locked up through the rest of my life so I don't have to worry about one of these bleak retirements where you're eating wallpaper paste.

There are some people that are predicting that the end times are nearing. What do you think of that?

Have you seen my show lately? I'll tell you what, it sure feels like the end is near. It feels like an apocalypse every time I take the stage. Things are getting worse for me. The crowds aren't as responsive. A lot of these people are suffering from their own problems. Drug addiction is a lot of it, unemployment, and that type of thing. They come out with a chip on your shoulder and all you can do is keep plugging away. It's not like when the end times come we're going to instantly die. We're all going to have to live through them. They suck half these people off to Hell and the rest of them are stuck here on Earth, which, in a way, is worse than Hell. We have to keep telling our jokes and keep an income coming in. As far as I know, I died and went to Hell a few years ago anyway. I have to spend the day driving around in my horrible car and doing these shows. Some of these shows are the worst things that I can think of. You talk about a Chinese water torture. I'm doing a show in this Chinese restaurant four nights ago and drinking the water that they served, that was a Chinese water torture. Performing before three people who really wanted me to leave. Here, I've been on television. You think that's going to help your career? That's not going to help anybody's career. You do these TV shows and the next night you're performing at a club where they pass around an empty bottle to pay you.

Nothing seems to help, really. Some of these guys are doing well. Larry the Cable Guy, do you remember him? Want to know my theory on him?

He's making all of his money doing the cable work, installing the cable. That's a regular paycheck. You get onstage you're not getting anything. I don't care who you are. Dave Cook, or who ever that guy is that travels around with those asshole comedians. They're selling out all of these places. I guess that's a good life, but who knows what problems he has mentally and emotionally that'll catch up with him one day. And, hopefully when it does, some of this money will filter down to folks like myself, Morgan Murphy, who's on the bill, or some of the other great acts that I tour with who need a little TLC from time to time instead of all of this misery we're going through.

With all of these dooms day type scenarios going around, what sort of role do you think you would play if we were in a Mad Max type situation?

Hopefully I could get some sort of job washing some of these cars. These guys in these futuristic Mad Max type vehicles, they've got to keep their image up. They can't be driving around with soot, smog, and all that all over the thing. You get a bucket, a rag, some dishwashing liquid, and you could clean these cars and get some money. I've thought of moving into this. I've said this many times, but I'm seriously thinking of doing some car washing before my shows. Let's face it, the money I get from performing all goes to my management, a percentage of that goes to my ex-wife, and my attorneys. But, if I were washing cars, they wouldn't know anything about it. I do think some of the things would appreciate their cars getting washed professionally by their favorite comedian, Neil Hamburger. While the opening act is going on I could be selling tickets at a dollar apiece in the parking lot to have your car washed. I wash these cars in the opening act, do a good job, and then go onstage and do my thing. That money goes to the management and I keep the carwash money. I do think I could make some real good money. Let's face it, if you have seventy-five people at a show who are Neil Hamburger fans who's cars needed a wash, I'd say at least half of those would probably hire me to wash the cars at a dollar a wash. That's thirty-seven dollars in my pocket and that's a better quality of life, I'll tell you that much. A couple nights of that and you can buy yourself a motel room or something to eat.

What do you think of Mel Gibson's current situation?

I think he's probably guilty of these things. The man was clearly drunk when he made that film about Jesus. It was like a bad drunken hallucination, that thing. I much prefer Jesus Christ Super Star and some of the more accurate retellings of the story. I think he'll probably get away with it too. Here's a guy that's got thousands of dollars in the bank and he can get a good lawyer, not one of these TV lawyers I've fell for with the eight hundred numbers. I wouldn't worry about him. He'll probably survive it. If it had been me, boy, I wouldn't be doing this interview because I wouldn't have the twenty cents to make a jailhouse phone call.

With all of your courtroom experience, do you think you're at the level where you could defend yourself?

I think it's going to come to that. I don't know if I'll do a good job. None of these lawyers have ever won a case for me and we've been to court quite a few times. When you have a zero percentage on something like that with these guys that have their own eight hundred number I don't see how a guy like me could do any better. I'll let you know. If you're going to be at this number, I'll let you know in a couple of weeks because we do have another case coming up. I would say doubtful.

Do you think that because of global warming we should start looking into space exploration?

Yeah, if we can do shows out there and make some

money. Some of these space station shows. They used to have shows at airport lounges, but you don't see that anymore. They got the big screen TV that shows football games and what have you and now the guy that used to tell the jokes at the airport lounge is out on the street. I think a space transfer station would be a great place to set up a little comedy type club. You could get a pianist open the night, then have a comedian, and then have the piano guy come out and do a couple more songs and you got a great night out. I am looking into space exploration as a means of earning an income and avoiding further financial woes.

I heard that a lot of times when astronauts come back from space they turn into astrojerks or jerkstronauts. They're always gloating about being in space, like, "Oh, I've been to space, I don't need to talk to you." Do you think that'll be a problem if everyone's going up there?

Gosh, I didn't think about that. It could create a whole generation of assholes- asstroholes. You meet a lot of those people anyway if you work with these rock and roll bands. These guys just get off the stage and think they're the cock of the walk. A little bit of spotlight on them and they think they're cock of the world. Imagine sending these guys into space. Geez. It's not going to make it a good world to live in for guys like you and me. Old school guys. Old fashioned sort of people who like to keep to ourselves. I don't toot my horn about my accomplishments one bit. Of course, that's because my accomplishments aren't really much.

Also, a lot of people would be making jokes like, "I've been to Uranus."

Yeah, exactly, you'd have that and, well, that's a joke I might use, actually. Thank you for that tip. If I were to get a show in a space station in Uranus or something that'd be a good opening line.

When you were growing up, did you ever think that you'd like to be an astronaut?

Yeah, it was, because that was a high paying job and I was afraid I'd gravitate more toward a low paying job, which is just what I did.

Had you ever thought of being President?

I did, but, let's face it, I couldn't get the votes. I tried running when I was twelve-years-old. I put some posters up in a Laundromat. And nothing happened with that, so I'm not going to make a second run, although I do think my profile is higher than it was then. Some of these TV shows, and night after night onstage, but running for president requires buttons, banners, and I'm not really at the point where I can print that stuff out unless I'm selling it. We do sell buttons from time to time, but that's selling them. These guys that run for president are giving them away. That's out of the realm of my possibilities

Doug Stanhope is running for President in 2008.

I'd probably vote for him. The problem is, I'm not in town and can't get to the ballot box from the road. They have an absentee ballot, but I don't have a stamp. If someone wants to give me a stamp, they've got my vote. Mr. Stanhope's a great guy. I'd vote for him for King of the World, but there's no election for that, you know.

Have you thought of doing the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh?

I'm always thinking about any sort of paying gig, but thinking about it and having them invite you is a totally different thing. I'm thinking about going to The White House this afternoon for some tea, but I'll have more of this fruit cocktail instead. People eat in these fancy restaurants: Denny's, Whataburger, and that type of thing. I can't afford it at this point, but there's nothing that can stop you

pulling into their parking lot just like anyone else and eating the food in their parking lot. "And for dinner, I feel like going to the Sizzler," then you do the same thing: pull into their parking lot and have your fruit cocktail. That way, when I ask where you ate, you can say, "I ate at Denny's and the Sizzler." Well, you're living well Mr. Hamburger. That's right, I am. You gotta use the old brain sometimes to increase the quality of life.

What do you use to stay up when you have to drive late at night?

Sometimes the thoughts are screaming in the brain and that'll keep you up, believe me. It'll keep you up like nothing else. You have a bad show and think about the things and the things that they say to you afterwards. That'll eat away at you for a couple of hours. Sometimes I try to get Red Bull. I'm trying to get an endorsement deal from those guys. That'll keep you awake and save your life. Occasionally, I'll swipe one of these cans from a bar when no one's looking. They're pretty small.

Do you do any sightseeing once you get to the venue?

I don't really like to see most of the sights in these venues. It's kind of better if you don't look around and get to the stage right away. If you look at the bathrooms and that sort of thing it's going to be so disgusting that you're going to start second guessing why you do this sort of thing in the first place. It's best just to walk right on the stage without giving the pace a second look. Also, the more of the sight seeing you do the more people you might encounter and, let's face it, some of the people that come to these shows are insane. They'll really rip your heart out if you can. We do have some good fans. We have some good hometown people that come out. I had a guy that brought a packet of Fritos corn chips the other day and just gave it to me as a gift. I really appreciated that. I could always use stamps. Anyone who has stamps that wants to come out A girl slipped me a five-dollar bill the other day, if you can believe that, in North Carolina. She said, "Here you go, Neil. Buy yourself something," and that was nice.

If anyone's reading your newspaper, tell them to bring me something that makes it worthwhile. I'm not much on the shows themselves. Have you ever gone to one of these topless types of nightclubs, with the women?

No.

Back when I had a couple of good shows with Guided by Voices and was paid good money, I went to one of these things afterward. Those girls don't get paid anything. They work strictly for tips. And that's how it is with me. There's money being generated, but it's going to someone else. The tips make a difference. You can give to the Diabetes Association, but why not give it to me instead?

Do you get any downtime?

There's no downtime. You hit the road and get to the next show.

Do you get to see movies or watch TV?

Sometimes I get a hotel. Not every time, but if I'm touring with one of these rock and roll bands. They pay a little bit better and get a hotel. I go on Priceline. I do see some of the movies that come on television, cable TV, and that type of thing. There's a theater in Los Angeles with two dollar tickets, but most of them aren't as good as anything you and I could make, so it just eats at you even more. When you're watching these films, you're not really laughing, no one really laughing, and you just feel depressed. Have you seen The Benchwarmers? About these idiot baseball guys.

No, that didn't look very good.

That wasn't too good. I saw that one and it wasn't a real good way to spend an afternoon, but my car

broke down and it was Mississippi in this little town. They were going to work on the car and they said, "Mr. Hamburger, it's going to be five or six hours until this thing is ready. You can sit in the lobby and read two year old Newsweeks or you can go across the street to this mall and catch a movie." We had a bit of money. That was a good time. I was making a hundred dollars a show opening for one of these rock and roll bands. Of course, most of the money went into fixing this fan belt that snapped and broke a lot of things on the way, but I did have three dollars to catch The Benchwarmers. I could have helped that movie out. You got people in it that are acting in it that are bad, there's no story, and people were crying in the theater. There were agitated kids in tears.

We had a script that we put together for a Neil Hamburger movie and we shopped this out to anyone that would listen. We gave one to the mechanic in Mississippi even. You get a few people to throw some money in the pot, make this film, and give them money back and, hey, they might make a profit on the way. That's what we're aiming to do. I think we could make a better product than The Benchwarmers, but I could be wrong. If you got some money to spare, we could use it to put this thing together. It'd help my career, help the careers of these investors, and get off the road. If you make a movie, you're not on the road all the time. And that would be nice.

Do you think that if you no longer had to go on the road that you'd still choose to go on the road?

That's like saying, "If you had fourteen legs, would you become an Olympic runner?" You're talking about things outside the realm of possibility, so there's no reason to think about these things.

What do you like to do after a performance?

I generally don't have a choice. It's not what I like to do it's what I have to do, which is get to the next show. If you've got a lot of driving the next day, you might drive a couple of hours afterward just to get a head start. Or you can drive to a rest area or parking lot where you can get some sleep. The Days Inn often has parking lot where so many of their clientele have beat up old cars that they won't notice if another one pulls in. And they're not going to notice me sleeping in the car unless they peer into the window. You can't sleep anywhere or you'll get arrested for loitering or vagrancy. You got to find a place that no one will notice and then you can get that sleep.

Have you thought of documenting your travels in the way Dave Cook has?

I'd like to document it the way he does by making it into a big money making television show. I've thought of doing a lot of things the way he does. Like collecting a big fat pay checks for putting on substandard performances where your heart's not in it and telling jokes that really shouldn't be told but they're all you've got so you tell them anyway. The difference is I'm not making any money, I don't have a TV series, and I don't have a camera guy following me around every time I'm sitting the on toilet.

Is this new Neil Hamburger Myspacethe official one?

It is. Everyone says that this is the way to make your career to really take off. People throw coins at me and I save them and use these coin-operated computers at the truck stop. I try to add more friends and answer all the requests, but, let's face it, I don't have the time to really get into the Myspace world. Is there another impostor? We had a guy on there date raping women and doing all kinds of things using my name and squandering all the good will that I've built up. Is there another one?

I think this is your official one. It says that it's real, but that's also something a fake one would say.

The one that we have is called The Real Neil

Hamburger, to keep things real, as they say in the hip-hop community.

Well, that's the end of the interview.

I pity the poor man that has to transcribe this. Then again, you may not be transcribing it at all. You could hang up the phone, call up Mr. Dave Cook, and then record over what I just said. It wouldn't be the first time.

He might be too loud and pop one of my eardrums.

You don't want that because then your whole career as a guy who does interviews is over. You'd end up doing something like car washes, fast food, or comedy.

Neil Hamburger will be appearing at Pianos on the 27th and at Maxwell's on the 26th of August along with Morgan Murphy.

https://web.archive.org/web/20061101011258/www.amazingwebzine.com/

Neil Hamburger

Ladies and gentleman... Nnnnnnnnnneeeeeeeeiiiiiiill Hamburgerrrrrr. On a recent trip through Memphis I found out Neil was in town for a show. After his performance, which included spitting up on, throwing drinks at, and verbally abusing some clueless hecklers, we sat down to discuss his past, future, and the women of the Flying J truck stop.

Alright, so, I am here with "America's Funnyman" Mr. Neil Hamburger.. So.. Neil... What is your opinion on the afterlife.. if one does exist.. and if so, what would it be like?

Well, it's gotta be better than this. I feel I've already gone to hell, ya know, with my career and with some of the failed projects I've been involved with, some of these albums that have not sold enough to even pay for the cost of hiring a taxi to take them to the dump, ya know? This is hell and uh... I look forward to any sort of chance to relax and rest and hopefully ya got some of the topless girls in hell that I don't seem to encounter here on earth, ya know what I'm saying?

That's great. So you have an optimistic outlook there on the afterlife.

Oh, it's a very optimistic act that I have in general.

Right. So what did you do before you became "America's Funnyman"?

Well, I was miserable, which has continued actually through this career as "America's Funnyman", which is a copyrighted phrase. But uh... I did some work in the fast food industry. Some low paying work and..

Taco Bell?

No, no Taco Bell but some of the other chains.. I don't want to mention them here because they don't mention me. They don't hire me to do ads for them at this point so why should I advertise them in your magazine? You know what I'm saying?

Yeah, good point. Fuck it. Fuck corporate chains.

Exactly.

Right. So, speaking of food, you're on the road a lot. What are some of your favorite places to eat, different places to go?

Well, I like to eat in the front seat of my car because I usually don't have the time to go to actual restaurants you know because you got.. when you're driving 700-800 miles a day you can really throw your schedule off...yeah you go to one of these restaurants, sit down for a couple hours... so know what I'm saying? So sometimes I'll go move into the back seat of the car and eat but generally if I'm driving... you know you wanna stay in the front seat while you're driving.

Ok. So, another traveling question: Flying J or TA?

I think I like the Flying J. I bought a television set there for nineteen dollars and ninety nine cents. COBY brand. C-O-B-Y. And uh.. little black and white with a five inch screen and you plug it in to the cigarette lighter and you can find out what's going on in the world there and uh.. TA you know you have the whole "tits 'n ass" thing which is uh.. appealing, but then you go there and there is no "tits 'n ass", you know? It's just a lot of stale Payday bars... you know? So the Flying J works for me.

Oh, I agree. I prefer it too. So, if you would sum up in two words the following cities:

New York City

Well, you know they say if you can make it there you can make it anywhere, you know the song I'm talkin' about? But I have found that that is not true. The New York City crowds are very... easy, you know? They come out in huge numbers and they laugh and uh..it's always a good paying show and a good time. If you can make it in uh.. you know.. Sioux Falls, South Dakota you can make it anywhere. And I actually did a show in Sioux Falls last month and I'm happy to report that the response was much better than I ever could have anticipated.

So if you had to sum up New York City in two words maybe you would say "very easy"?

I would say I can't afford uh... I can't afford it because of the.. you know.. it's very expensive. The parking? Have you parked your car there?

Lucky I don't drive.

I parked.. you know I travel in a car. I can't take the Greyhound Bus anymore you know it's too painful on the back but uh.. I had a car parked in New York City and the parking was two thirds of what I got for the show and then when you give the other third to the management and the booking agency there's not much left, you know what I mean? It's a tough way to live. Warn your readers.

I know. Ok, and one other city I'm curious to know what you think of:

Boise, Idaho

You know that is a town I have been *through* but I have not yet done a show there.

That's wise.

Really?

If you wanna listen to what I have to say, I would say Boise is a good driving day. You don't need to stop there.

Well, I was offered a show there once and it fell through but you know that's where the Albertson's grocery chain has their headquarters so you probably.. I'm sure somewhere in the town is an outlet for dented cans so... which is something that I'm always interested in, that is getting a fruit cocktail at a discount price because that is what I use mostly as food at this point.

Ok. Have you ever received any strange gifts from fans or followers?

Oh, all the time. You know people bring me all kinds of things. Some of the women, you know, with their uh.. some of the ideas they have are sort of strange. Some of the gentleman will give me CD's of the music they've made with their.. with their miserable bands and that sort of thing but I got a twelve dollar tip in Chapel Hill, North Carolina the other night. A young woman bought some merchandise and tipped me TWELVE DOLLARS. And because all the money for the shows goes straight to the legal bills and the ex-wife and that sort of thing, these tips are mine to keep. So this young woman paid for at least twelve meals for me because I do tend to eat a lot of, you know, 99 cent fruit cocktail.

Um... so what is the best way to win a woman's heart?

Well, it's probably to avoid getting on stage and telling the jokes that I tell. Avoid releasing albums like "Great Moments at Di Presa's Pizza House". Avoid touring the clubs I tour in because quite frankly I have not been around women very much in the last few years. It's been a very lonely lonely life and.. occasionally when they ask to pose for a photo with me, it's a great treat. But for the most part the women I know are the women at the Flying J truck stop. The sort of obese kind of women that work behind the counter there, and I am on a first name basis with quite a few of them as I do tour through the same regions again and again.

You ever take advantage of the.. you ever get to score the free shower at the truck stops? Like you just.. they kinda feel sorry for you... they'll just give you the free shower. Has that ever happened?

Well, what I have done is in the past is I go over to where the trucks are and I walk out from behind one of the trucks and into the building and then they assume I was in the truck and that's how you get the free shower. So...

That's a good idea. So you've toured with a lot of bands in the past. Are there any bands currently that you haven't been on the road with that you would like to come with you?

I would like to tour with Frank Sinatra Jr.. He has been my idol for many years. I would like to tour with Kenny Rodgers. Now that he has had the plastic surgery I think that his act has doubled in quality. And other than that uh... probably not... you know I was very excited recently I did a show in Los Angeles with Petra Haden and uh.. she made a really great album recently and to be on that bill was a real feather in my cap I have to say.

In your opinion who truly plays "music of the night"? IF there is an artist that plays "music of the night"...

Music of the night? That would have to be the Doobie Brothers because you know those guys are filthy, dirty, and really disgusting human beings and you know it is the night that disguises that I think. In the night they might appear to be just shadows but in fact they're filthy, dirty, bearded, stinking, venereal disease-ridden men with permanent erections and it is only in the cover of the night that they can get away with what they do, which is to play their music... their great hits...

Ok... where do you see yourself next February?

Next February? I'll be touring Texas in February, that's on the schedule. So probably Denton, Texas and Houston, Austin and perhaps we'll do a show in Mobile, Alabama. So come on out... if this comes out in February hopefully the readers will come out to those shows and save me from financial ruin and embarrassment.

This will definitely come out before February. Um.. Ok, how about in the next 23 years?

Well, I'll probably back here at this club doing the show again because let's face it: I'm not gonna get out of debt anytime soon and the bills have to be paid and I would love to retire but that's not gonna happen either so it's gonna be doing these shows on a continuous loop until death strikes me down and at that point, good, I can get some sleep.

And then you'll be in hell with the topless women.

Exactly. Exactly. If I'm lucky.

Ok. Last question. If you could finish this joke for me: Why did Neil Hamburger cross the road?

Well, because he had another show to do.

There you have it. Alright. Thanks a lot.

Thank you. I hope you can use some of these. I do realize some of the answers were substandard.

No. It's perfect.

BURGERTIME

An Interview with NEIL HAMBURGER

By Mike Cade

https://web.archive.org/web/20010519183358/http://www.maximum-ink.com/archive/98/jul/html/neil_hamburger.html

BURGERTIME

An Interview with NEIL HAMBURGER

By Mike Cade

Do you hate comedians? Yeah, me too. In fact, I firmly believe the world would be a better place if Billy Crystal, Paul Reiser, Robin Williams, and Sinbad were sentenced to a life of indentured servitude. However, there's one comic out there who's touched me in ways I could not anticipate. His shitty delivery, anti-climactic punchlines, awkward timing, and overly obscure references bring me to the threshold of tears. His name's Neil Hamburger and he's a throwback to the Vaudeville era comics, who, after their Golden Eras passed, still trudged onward in a brutal, indifferent, and thankless

world. Neil recently took time out of his busy schedule to speak with **Max Ink** about his alleged alter-ego (some say Neil's a certain wise-ass musician whose name I won't reveal). Neil also shared thoughts on his ``show-stopping" zipper shtick, suicide, and the two albums he's got on Drag City, ***America's Funnyman*** and the more vulgar, recently released ***Raw Hamburger***.

Maximum Ink: *Your last two albums were put out by Drag City but I know you're an Amarillo guy at heart. Just curious; did you establish a friendship with Anton LaVey when he was making records for Amarillo?*

Neil Hamburger: I don't really know any of the other comedians on these record labels. They never seem to have ``company picnics," or if they do, I've not been invited. Typical—but hey, THAT'S MY LIFE!

MI: *How did you get the idea for the ``zipper schtick"?*

NH: Sometimes the mind works like quicksilver. I can't really give away any of the details, however.

MI: *I heard you have a tribute to Princess Diana in the works. What's the skinny on that?*

NH: I have been performing my humorous tribute to the late Princess for quite some time now, since the night after she died. Recently, we recorded it at a show in Australia, and it is being released as a commemorative record.

MI: *Has anyone accused you of ``selling out" by taking the* ***Raw Hamburger*** *route?*

The only known image of Neil Hamburger (pictured in the middle), we don't know who the other guys are!!

NH: Yes, they have. And I hope we sell out further—as in, a ``Sold Out" show at Carnegie Hall!

MI: *On* ***America's Funnyman*** *you said you've attempted suicide. How does someone like yourself deal with depression?*

NH: You just keep plugging away. Another day, another show. Perhaps there will be some laughs.

MI: *Have you or will you ever perform in our great state of Wisconsin?*

NH: Many, many times. Just loved it. Incredible crowds, though not for my performances. We'll be back there in August…three shows at the Pizza Piazza Palace and then a couple more warming things up at the Knights of Columbus Bingo Hall.

MI: *Rumor has it you're in a couple of bands on the side. Care to talk about your musical endeavors?*

NH: Those rumors aren't true, although I did record a musical comedy ditty on my latest album, **Raw Hamburger**. We're hoping it could be a hit.

MI: *Another rumor for ya: some say Neil Hamburger is the alter-ego of a ``certain someone" whose name I won't mention. Care to comment on that?*

NH: If that certain someone has a more successful career than me, well, I hope the rumor's true! Because seriously, my bookings have been a little grim recently. But, no, as far as I know, I am the one and only ``Neil Hamburger."

MI: *Last question: what other projects are in the works? I think a Neil Hamburger cartoon would be great.*

NH: I recently finished writing my autobiography and am looking forward to its publication if we can work out a deal. And then I always hope to make more recordings and play more shows, wherever I can!

MI: Well, thanks for your time! I hope to chat with you again in the future.

NH: Thank you!

The Boston Phoenix, September 4, 2007

https://thephoenix.com/Boston/Arts/46681-NEIL-HAMBURGER/

Dance Monkey: Neil Hamburger

A visiting comic in the hot seat

By SARA FAITH ALTERMAN | September 4, 2007

How do you feel about cheese?
It is not fit for human consumption, though it does work well as a glue for keeping my car door from blowing out of its frame.

How do you feel about feelings?
Those are a nightmare. Do not allow the drug generation to persuade you to tear down your internal wall.

Neil Hamburger

What's the most colorful insult a heckler has thrown at you during a show?
"I am curious (yellow)."

Cats or dogs? Chicken or beef? Boxers or briefs?
Mock-chicken made with cat, served by a waiter in briefs.

Alberto Gonzales resigned! Who do you think will be the next member of the Bush Administration to give himself the ax?
Neil Hamburger.

Neil Hamburger | Middle East upstairs, Cambridge | September 9 | 617.864.EAST

Zipper Lips rides again

Neil Hamburger is perhaps the most unnatural man in American comedy

by Paul Curry

March 4, 2009

https://www.leoweekly.com/arts/zipper-lips-rides-again-15774451/

Photo by Robyn Von Swank

When I offered to write a 2,500-word article about Neil Hamburger, I was joking. The idea of dedicating so much ink to promote a performer who would only be doing one local show in a room with a maximum capacity of 300 was absurd to begin with, but considering the confounding nature of Hamburger's work, the fact that most people will never understand or accept his shtick, the fact that most people would find his work hateful, disturbing or at least annoying — well, at that point it started to make sense.

On the other hand, Hamburger's shows are usually more fun when the audience is unprepared. His unusual approach to stand-up comedy doesn't really reach the heights unless there's somebody in the audience who just doesn't understand what's going on and feels compelled to make sure everyone else in the room knows how lost they are. With that in mind, I'm afraid I may be doing a disservice to Neil Hamburger and his fans by letting you in on it beforehand. But chances are the show is already sold out, and most ticket holders know the score, so it doesn't matter.

Neil Hamburger is not a real person. He's a character created by Australian-born Gregg Turkington, a former indie-rock entrepreneur turned performance artist. In 1992, as the owner of the small, independent record company Amarillo Records, Turkington released an album of "real" prank phone calls called *Great Phone Calls*. The album art featured a vintage photo of a naked lady sitting on a bed with her hand on a telephone and a promise in bold capital letters that YOUR SIDES WILL ACHE FROM CONVULSIVE LAUGHTER. Could such a ploy fail? Huge sales were assured.

Unfortunate buyers of the album were almost certainly disappointed by the haphazard, uncomfortable and not very funny collection of conversations with unsuspecting pizza restaurant employees and disc jockeys. Two of the tracks, however, feature what must certainly be the on-the-spot creation of Neil Hamburger, an obnoxious, supposedly well-known stand-up comedian at one point looking for gigs in the area and later asking for a job washing dishes for a week because he's going to be appearing on "The Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson but needs a job in the meantime.

The raging success of *Great Phone Calls* was followed by a series of singles and EPs. In 1996, indie label Drag City released a full-fledged Neil Hamburger solo album, *America's Funnyman*. A work of singular vision, *America's Funnyman* presented a dramatically different version of the character; rather than the fast-talking phone prankster, the new Neil was a carefully crafted combination of wheezing, groaning discomfort and mean-spirited misery. The album was supposedly recorded live, but the very small audiences are intensely disinterested, and it sounds like one of the microphones was set up in an ice bin behind the bar. It is here, too, that we are introduced to the supposedly well-known "Zipper Shtick," which is apparently a sight gag of some sort.

With *America's Funnyman*, Hamburger explored a region of comedy beyond the telling of jokes, with the performer simply mentioning the names of people in the news and allowing his audience to fill in the gaps. Or not. The biggest laugh on the record comes when he says, utterly without context, "Condoms," but it seems the laughter has been added after the fact, in the studio, from a sound effects record.

The next step was, of course, actual live shows. Responding to what must have been a bewildering demand, Turkington made himself over physically, with thick black-rimmed eyeglasses, a horrendously greasy comb-over and his trademark thrift store tuxedo, and he hit the clubs. His relationship with Drag City led to bookings in venues that would ordinarily feature live music rather than comedy clubs. In 2003, a DVD, "Live at the Phoenix Greyhound Park," appeared, showing Hamburger "performing" for disinterested dog-racing fans.

Over the years Hamburger has made seven more albums, and the most surprising development is that he actually tells jokes. He has worked "blue" (telling raunchy, sexual-themed jokes) on an album called *Raw Hamburger*. On another album, *Laugh Out Lord*, he touched (very briefly) on religious topics. Still, his delivery is excruciatingly awkward, his jokes tend to be so filthy or mean-spirited that they defy social acceptability, and when he manages to deliver a punch line, he undercuts it almost completely by groaning, as if to telegraph the fact that the joke is not funny. And then, of course, he'll add his catchphrase, "But that's my life!," whether it follows logically from his previous discourse or not.

Meanwhile, over the years, Hamburger's back-story has been fleshed out, as he makes light of the wide variety of failures he has endured. Ironically, this pose makes his most recent effort, an album of country songs called *Neil Hamburger Sings Country Winners*, sound almost

Zipper Lips rides again
Neil Hamburger is perhaps the most unnatural man in American comedy
by Paul Curry
March 4, 2009

https://www.leoweekly.com/arts/zipper-lips-rides-again-15774451/

conventional, circa 1973. The musicians are clearly professional, and, as a songwriter, Hamburger works his strengths more effectively than ever before. On "The Recycle Bin," for instance, he becomes unreasonably angry about the things some people try to recycle, and plumbs the depths of misery by explaining that some things, like a failed career or marriage, simply cannot be recycled.

Indeed, the last few years seem to have been very, very good for Neil. He has made several appearances on Fox News Channel's "Red Eye," talking about entertainment and related topics. He has been featured on Adult Swim's "Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!", and he had a regular segment called "Poolside Chats" on "Tom Green Live." He toured with the musical comedy duo Tenacious D and appeared in their movie, "Tenacious D and the Pick of Destiny." He's even been featured on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" a few times, at one point telling what is undoubtedly the filthiest joke ever told on network television. Bits of these various appearances make up the bulk of the approximately 440 Neil Hamburger clips on YouTube, where he has a consistently high rating. Local fans will want to see his six- or seven-part interview with musician Will Oldham.

Still, if you ask Neil, things aren't so good. He claims he will be paying for his earlier mistakes long into the foreseeable future. On the other hand, he is a fictional character, so talking to him about his life, as I did recently, by phone, is kind of strange. It's impossible to tell how much of what he says is prepared material and how much he might be inventing on the spot. A question about the recent media attention he's been getting quickly turned into a story of woe:

"We had a thing in The New York Times just a couple days ago which was real nice because that paper's all over the place. I have gone to sleep so many times and used that as a blanket. It's around. You can find them. If you check the trash behind the, uh, not the Days Inn, at the Days Inn they tend to throw out the USA Today. That's not as thick of a paper, and so it's a colder night, but the Hilton or the Hyatt, something like that, you can usually find The New York Times and get a real good night's sleep with 'em."

And while Turkington lives in California with his wife, Hamburger is single and homeless.

"I don't know if you've been through a nasty divorce or fathered some children out of wedlock, you know, you might be in the same boat I am, you know, with the pay being garnished. In my case, not from the children out of wedlock, it's more from just a bad contract with a dishonest management company who claims I owe all this money for uh, really for I don't know what because they've done a horrible job. I mean, these guys represented me for the first several years of my career, back when I was playing pizzas parlors, and yet they wanted a fee for each one of those bookings. They did 365 bookings in a year playing to an average of seven people a night.

"There would be a sign that said, 'Monday night pizza special 2 large pizzas $9.99 Free Comedian,' you know, and I would just be standing there in the corner of the room, not even on a stage, usually, sometimes on a milk crate or not even, and telling these jokes. And then at the end of the night I'd get, you know, what they would call an honorarium, sometimes $5, sometimes $2, sometimes $10, sometimes nothing, sometimes a large pizza and a pitcher of Coke.

"But [my management] wanted $150 for every show they'd set up. Well, I wasn't making that kind of money. And the next thing I know, they've compounded that with interest, administration fees, they were charging, I think it was 79 percent interest per year on the unpaid balance of this. So it took a very short time, I stopped taking bookings from these guys and started doing it other ways, but the money I owed them just from these two years with the 79 percent interest, before long you're talking five and six figures."

There's almost always more than one thing going on when Hamburger starts talking. When I asked him about how he got started in comedy, he said, "It's been so long since I've been doing this, at this point it's hard to remember a time when I wasn't doing this."

Then he added:

"I worked for one of the fast-food restaurants. You know, for just a couple of weeks. I lost that job. And I went in to see the job counselor that I was working with, you know, this was with the state, and uh, I said, 'Gee, I couldn't keep that, I couldn't keep the fries cooking properly,' and they weren't happy with my work, cooking these french fries, we did onion rings also, and the guy said, 'Well, let's see. You can't handle that. You know, that's a job that most teenagers can handle. Let me see if I can find the job that's even lower on the totem pole in terms of prestige and also in terms of pay,' and of course that was stand-up comedy."

But it turns out Neil had some minor experience with comedy earlier in his life, and a natural aptitude — beyond his inability to do anything else.

"I was a troubled teen, and the youth counselor took a lot of the troubled teens to a comedy club in Hermosa Beach, Calif., called the Laugh Wharf, cause it was at the end of a wharf, of a pier, and they had a thing, it was three in the afternoon, when the club was closed, but they let some of these troubled teens of which I was one onto the stage to do some comedy. The counselor said this was a good way to exorcise our demons, as he put it. It was a small club, mostly the kids' parents, that sort of thing, but that was my first taste of it, and I really enjoyed it, you know, even though the response was so poor. There were a couple people that laughed. You know, I really, just hearing those two laughs — that really gets you going. It's addictive, you know. Now, I don't know if you're a crack cocaine abuser or not, a lot of the journalists I speak to are, but they say that this sort of laughter is similar to the addiction you get from the crack cocaine."

Now, of course, it seems like his career is taking off, but being busy doesn't necessarily translate into financial success. He doesn't get paid for his appearances on Fox News, for instance. By way of explanation, he adds — with a sly comment on television news — an anecdote about a recent tragedy.

Zipper Lips rides again

Neil Hamburger is perhaps the most unnatural man in American comedy

by Paul Curry

March 4, 2009

https://www.leoweekly.com/arts/zipper-lips-rides-again-15774451/

"A woman lost her whole family in a fire. I don't know if you saw this. It was in Tulsa or Oklahoma City, somewhere around there. There was a fire. The whole family burned to death. This woman was at work. And she came back — I think she had four kids and a husband and her mother, I think, was in the building, too. They all burned to death, OK? It was just horrible. Unbelievable grief. Unbelievably awful situation. And so Channel 9 is there putting a microphone in front of her face to get her comment on it, and, you know, she's very distraught. Well, anyway, you know, can you imagine when they go to talk to her to say how does it feel to lose your whole family in a fire and before they can do that they've got to get her to sign a contract on how much she's getting paid for this appearance. I mean, that's not gonna work out, you know. That's a mess.

"And what happens then — say you get paid $500 for each news appearance. You're gonna find people who are gonna go out there and burn down houses just so they can do the interview about it. Just think how much the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski, think about how much he would have made at $500 a pop talking about that. So you just can't do it. Now, in my case, it's really just too bad, cause I really could use the money, and I'm not convinced that Kevin Federline is really news. But nonetheless, that's the system that's in place and that's why, unfortunately, there is no pay."

And so, while he complains about "all these damn shows he has to do," Neil still manages to find joy in his work. He obviously has a complicated relationship with his audience, a seemingly impossible balance of compassion and contempt, as he made clear in this overview of his career:

"One thing I have learned in all these years of show business is that my role, my job, is to help others feel good and help others have a good night out, you know. Let's face it; I've been through a painful divorce. I've had so much failure in my life and career and so many hard knocks and these lawsuits and the lack of funding and an estranged daughter and failed albums and poor reviews. I had a tuxedo that was stolen, and so with all these disappointments, I feel that it's more important that I bring happiness to other folks and not worry so much about myself.

"And, you know, you get people to come out to these shows who are so miserable and have so many emotional problems, some of them have sexual impotence, or have lost their job, people who are just broken in many ways, and so if I can get out there and tell a few jokes and cheer them up and make them feel good and make them laugh their fool heads off, then I've done a good job. Much as if a plumber comes to your house and unplugs the toilet, or if you've got an onion in the garbage disposal that can clog that up completely. You know what I'm saying. The plumber can do his job, and remove the onion or whatever was in the toilet, he can feel good, and that's what I feel like. If I can remove the burden that is on these people's shoulders who come out to my shows, and if they walk out of there with even a slight smile on their faces, then I have done my job and then I can feel good."

Yeah, he can feel good about entertaining the poor miserable souls who have no other way to have their spirits lifted than by attending a Neil Hamburger show. It's a sly insult about the relationship between the entertainer and his audience; how pathetic they must be, those unlucky few who manage to make the show.

Well, I'll be there, so I know. But that's my life!

Starpulse Q&A: Neil Hamburger Discusses Survival And Wonders How The Likes of Dane Cook And Carrot Top Have Succeeded

2007-10-24

https://web.archive.org/web/20080523163631/http://www.starpulse.com/news/index.php/2007/10/24/starpulse_qaamp_a_neil_hamburg_discusses

Neil Hamburger, America's beloved funny man, is pulling the curtain on what may be one of the greatest injustices in entertainment today: the enslavement of comedians by an evil conglomerate made up of bookers, agents, lawyers, PR reps, and club owners. Forced to perform hundreds of shows a year for little if any pay, Neil Hamburger has managed to miraculously not only survive the industry, but also grace its biggest stage: Madison Square Garden.

And while Neil has enjoyed successes other than opening for Tenacious D on their arena tour, such as appearing several times on Jimmy Kimmel Live and on Comedy Central's Comedy Death Ray CD, and releasing several albums of his own via Drag Through Records, he continues to slip further into debt with every performance. Why does he do it? Why does he risk his health, his sanity, and disgrace his family? For you; for the laughs, for the smiles, and because he's got no choice, forced to comply by a legally binding contract that may only expire when Neil himself leaves this life for that great comedy club in the sky. Starpulse.com caught up with Neil in between his third and fourth show of the day. He was hungry, but slightly optimistic, hopeful for the change this expose may bring.

How are you?
I'm pretty good. How are you doing?

I'm doing well, just enjoying the remnants of a tasty jawbreaker.
So it's breakfast time there, then.

No. Do you consider a jawbreaker a sort of breakfast food?
I would think so if I could afford them, but I'm afraid we're strictly not at that point right now.

What is the traditional Neil Hamburger breakfast?
At this point, sometimes at these motels they have a free continental breakfast, so we'll sneak a few rolls out of those and save them for future days where there isn't free continental breakfast. So it's going to either be a roll, or a roll that's several days old. Or nothing.

Did you just finish up this tour that you were on?
I wish we finished up the tour that I'm on, because it's been going on for twenty years. But it's continuing on.

I was referring to this particular stretch of shows that I had helped you promote.
I think so, yeah. I think we did finish that stretch, but then another one started right up. There's no rest in this business, I'm afraid.

What sort of promotions do you typically do?

I don't do any promotion. I just show up. We've got people at Drag City. We've got a lot of my terrible records that didn't do so well, but they do a great job of getting promotion. A lot of times we'll come to these little towns, and even there they have a tiny newspaper, there's an article. So these guys do a great job. We had one town that I played in. Oh, I don't remember the name. It was rural, rural Alabama, and they didn't even have a newspaper. And there was a kid that had an old mimeograph machine, you know, with the purple ink. And he had written an article about the show and was giving it out in front of the pizza parlor that I was playing in. It helps to have people on your side that promote these things.

Has Drag City ever suggested any promotional stunts?
They do all of that stuff themselves. They're in Chicago, they have a big office. I don't have anything to do with that. They take care of everything, and they do a great job. And I'll do whatever I'm asked. If they want me to go to the opening of an orange juice stand or something like that and sign things, I would do that. I did some things on television or radio, interviews with folks such as yourself, try to help sell this crap. Because you need to get people to buy it somehow. They're not going to buy it because they like the show.

Why would they buy it, then?
Because this promotional campaign is so good. Why do people buy all those Pringles potato chips? Do you think those are good? Well, I've got news for you. They're not.

Have you noticed that Pringles has a new campaign where they have trivia questions inscribed on the chip?
Yeah, you see what I mean? This is something no one would eat, but people like to play trivia. So, they think, "No one will eat these chips. We have billions of canisters of this stuff sitting here, getting old. What are we going to do?" And then somebody gets a bright idea, "Let's print trivia on it." Another thing you could do is print dollar bills onto these chips. People would love to eat money. It empowers them.

Have you ever eaten money?
I did eat some Malaysian ringgit. That's the currency in Malaysia. Because we got back from that tour, and I had a few of these things still stuck in the back of my tuxedo pants pocket, because I spilled a lot of the tropical drinks on myself during the course of the show. Some of it was sticking to the tux, and this was a day when we were touring in rural Montana. Nothing to eat, so I did eat a couple Malaysian ringgit. I guess it was probably about twenty ringgit. That's not cheap.

Not necessarily the most nutritious meal that you could have had.
It was terrible, and if it wasn't for the alcohol I would not recommend this. This was out of desperation. We were broken down by the side of the road, and there wasn't anything for miles. I would have eaten the emergency flare, but I needed that to summon help.

What happened?
Just another flat. When you buy these retread tires, you get a whole lot of problems. They take the same shitty tire and just spray it with tar or whatever every couple of weeks, and then that wears off again, and then you're back with the same shitty tire you started with. But it's cheap. You can get these tires for five, ten dollars.

You mentioned you'd eaten this coin out of desperation. What are some other things you've eaten out of desperation?

Starpulse Q&A: Neil Hamburger Discusses Survival And Wonders How The Likes of Dane Cook And Carrot Top Have Succeeded

2007-10-24

https://web.archive.org/web/20080523163631/http://www.starpulse.com/news/index.php/2007/10/24/starpulse_qaamp_a_neil_hamburg_discusses

I've eaten a lot of pizza crusts, just the leftover crusts that are left on the table. When you do one of these pizza parlor shows and they refuse to give you a free pizza as part of the deal even though it's in the contract, and some of those shows where I haven't been paid anything-- I don't know if this is really helping to promote my act, by the way, getting anecdotes from me eating leftover pizza crusts. I don't know that this is really beneficial, talking about this. I don't see how this is going to help sell any records or bring anyone to the shows. It may repel people.

I find that interviews that are full of anecdotes get people excited about the subject. They see that if Neil Hamburger's life is full of these stories and the sacrifices that he makes for the craft of comedy, then they'll certainly be intrigued to check out the comedy of Neil Hamburger.

Well, I hope your theory is right. Who has this worked for?
The best example I have is there was this author who was living in New York, and he had done a one-man show. And after I had interviewed him about his various escapades, he was invited by Duke University to give a performance of his one-man show.
Can you hook me up with the Duke University people?

This particular publication was founded by a guy who came to New York and was so impressed by the comedy scene that he wanted to start a magazine all about the many performers who live in New York. I contribute interviews with performers who live outside the city, such as yourself.
Sounds like a big zero when you add it all up in terms of getting that Duke University scholarship.

What would you do with a scholarship?
Well, I believe a scholarship usually at least includes a place to sleep. And some of them, you get to eat at the cafeteria. So right there, that's two things that are better than my comedy career.

Even if that were the case, wouldn't you have to go to school then?
I don't mind sitting around listening to these guys talk. I might even learn something. It's certainly better than standing around at these nightclubs while these diseased creeps breathe all over you. There are people with hepatitis and dead bugs, all kinds of things are going on. You put yourself out in public like I'm doing, that's how typhoid spread, with people congregating in these sorts of environments. It's not safe, and it doesn't pay well, and I'm very worried. It's been a while since we had a huge epidemic. And the last place you want to be is trapped up inside one of these little clubs with no ventilation. That's the last thing you want to do.

So you haven't had the inoculations against say, the typhoid, and the mumps and measles?
Well, I've eaten a lot of moldy pizza crusts, and the penicillin in that-- that's where you get that-- so I could be in good shape. You do have a point.

Let's say that somehow Duke got a hold of this interview, they like the Neil Hamburger brand, they want to give you a scholarship. Would you go back to school?
I don't mind sitting around listening to these guys talk. I might even learn something. It's certainly better than standing around at these nightclubs while these diseased creeps breathe all over you. There are people with hepatitis and dead bugs, all kinds of things are going on. You put yourself out in public like I'm doing, that's how typhoid spread, with people congregating in these sorts of environments. It's not safe, and it doesn't pay well, and I'm very worried. It's been a while since we had a huge epidemic. And the last place you want to be is trapped up inside one of these little clubs with no ventilation. That's the last thing you want to do.

So you haven't had the inoculations against say, the typhoid, and the mumps and measles?
Well, I've eaten a lot of moldy pizza crusts, and the penicillin in that-- that's where you get that-- so I could be in good shape. You do have a point.

Let's say that somehow Duke got a hold of this interview, they like the Neil Hamburger brand, they want to give you a scholarship. Would you go back to school?
I would like to be a professor there. Because then I could just do the same thing, tell these jokes. And we bill it as, "A Course in American Comedy," or something. But then I just get up and do my act everyday, get paid, have a place to live. You know these university guys, the professors, they get perks. Parking and wine, all kinds of things.

What are some things that people can learn from one of your performances?
They can learn that if they have an 11:00 AM course on American Comedy with Professor Hamburger, and then they have a 12:30 course on brain surgery with Professor Martin, they would learn that they should really pay more attention to Professor Martin because he can teach them something that they can actually have a successful career at. I think it would be a good thing for motivating kids to pay more attention to the other professors and other careers. It's a cautionary tale. It's like when you're in school and they show you all those films of the people doing the LSD, PCP and that whole mess. It helps lead you toward a better life.

I don't know if you're aware, but college professor is one of the most prestigious professions in the country.
I know. Believe me, it's several steps up above TV comic. People see Neil Hamburger and they say, "Neil, that looks so exciting, being under the spotlight." But you're sweating under the spotlight, and you're not earning any money. What's prestigious about standing under a light? How is that prestigious? Standing under a light is a nightmare. Would you go outside and stand under the sun and just stand there all day sweating?

Some people actually pay good money to do some sweating. They'll go to the gym and go to the sauna.
But they're building up muscles. If you're just standing there, you can't build any muscles. If you've got muscles, you can work as a bouncer. That is a prestigious job. That's a great job. Those guys make money. I know, I've talked to them, I've been thrown out the back door by them, I've seen they throw people at my shows right out the side door. And those guys get good money.

But in a way, since you mentioned that your life and

Starpulse Q&A: Neil Hamburger Discusses Survival And Wonders How The Likes of Dane Cook And Carrot Top Have Succeeded

2007-10-24

https://web.archive.org/web/20080523163631/http://www.starpulse.com/news/index.php/2007/10/24/starpulse_qaamp_a_neil_hamburg_discusses

your career can be a bit of a cautionary tale, you're a bit of a bouncer at the club of comedy.
In what way are you saying, Ben?

You said that people, given the choice between brain surgeon and comedian, should take the brain surgeon route. You're kind of bouncing those people out.
So you're saying that I'm a bouncer.

In a way.
Because you're saying that the jokes are poor quality? Where is this interview going?

No, that's not true at all! I'm a big fan of your jokes. It's just that the tales you tell of harrowing hardships and these communicable diseases--
These aren't tales, though. That's something you get from Aesop. This all really happens. This is a nightmare, Ben, this is not something you want to get tangled up in. I don't know why you spend so much time talking about these people and writing about this mess. This is one of the great suppressed stories in the media today, the enslavement of these low level entertainers such as myself. And the closer you get to it, you could get burned by this. You could find that you no longer have your six-figure career as a journalist, and instead you're enslaved in this awful, endless loop that there's no getting out of. Be careful. These guys go down to Thailand to write about the sex slavery, and before you know it they're chained up with a ping-pong ball in their mouth. You've got to be careful.

Perhaps we can do a bit of an expose on the hardships of comedians.
That's what I'm saying, of course, I'd love to do an expose like that and improve the lifestyle for comedians such as myself who are suffering. But I'm worried about your health. The guys that run these clubs, they don't screw around. The people that hire me, they're not going to release me from these contracts, and they're not going to let me go. If they see somebody like you is out there needling them and basically daring them to do better, you may you find yourself with cement shoes in the bottom of-- what's the filthy river in New Jersey? That river. The filthy, filthy river. That's where you'll be. Watch out. You think that when they had slavery in the United States that they gave that up without a fight? Believe me, the creeps that wanted slaves, they went to war over this. And thankfully, they lost. But these guys that are enslaving comedians, I don't know that they would lose. I haven't been able to make any headway into getting out of this mess. All I can do is take solace in the fact that I do help a few people by causing them to laugh their problems away.

Have you heard of any journalist being disappeared, so to speak?
How would you hear that? I've done interviews with guys and they said, "I'll see you at the show Thursday night. I would love to meet you, that was a great interview, that was a lot of fun." We had a guy in St. Louis who I talked to. The article runs saying, "Poor Neil. He's not making any money. It's all going to the management company. These comedy clubs ripped him off. Oh poor Neil, these lawyers. They're garnishing his pay. The IRS..." All these things are happening. I talk to this guy off the record about this. He prints it all. It comes out on Wednesday in St. Louis. Thursday's the show. He was never there. He said he was going to try to make it. As far as I know, check the paper. Do a search for a car bomb in St. Louis. You may find this guy.

So it seems like being a comedian journalist is a bit of a dangerous profession.
Yeah. I would say it is. Because being a comedian is a dangerous profession, unless you like being a human slave. Unless you like having people throw apples at you, or lemons sometimes; we've had lemons. Unless you like arguing with folks after the show about how they're supposed to pay you the money, but they're not going to for whatever reason they've cooked up. Sometimes you get the good shows. We did a show recently at the Knitting Factory nightclub. They paid good money, and they treated me real well. They gave me quite a few drinks, and food to eat, and a room to sleep in, and all that. But then three nights later, you're playing at one of these-- I don't want to name them by name, but we'll just say a Connecticut pizza restaurant-- and it's a complete opposite. You've got guys looking at their watch, and I walk off stage after fifty-nine minutes, and they say, "Neil, your contract was for an hour. We can't pay you tonight." And I'm like, "Well, you at least gotta give me the extra large pizza that's in the contract." They said, "I don't think you understood what we said. We're not paying you, Neil, and you've got three minutes to vacate the premises." And this is after all these people are laughing, having a great time, saying, "Neil, can I have a photo with you?" It felt like a triumphant evening, and to have it end that way, and have to get out of the state for fear. And then you want to write about this, you want to expose this? You may be surprised at the knocks that come knocking at your door.

This sort of controversy may benefit your career greatly, and mine as well, because people will see this world that we're unveiling to them. You've got Neil Hamburger, the heroic comedian, taking a stand for his rights and the rights of every comedian. And they want to know, "Who's Neil? What are his CDs like? Where can I buy them?"
Well, I'll tell you where. You can buy them everywhere. Amazon, walmart.com, and all of them. I'll tell you this much. If you want to take that angle, hire a private bodyguard. I would love to see this stuff exposed. I would love to see the working conditions changed. And they do change at certain nightclubs. There are certain nightclubs that go out of their way to treat me very well, and it really makes a different. The Middle East nightclub in Boston, Massachusetts. They always serve up French fries to me. And I always get the falafel ball. But then you play the next night in-- I can't even give the name of this little town-- but believe me, these guys are packing heat. They want you to do the show they want you to do and to get out of there without even asking them about pay. That's a grave insult to them. And of course the management company I work with is in cahoots with all these guys. So what they're doing is they're paying the management company something for booking, for having me there, they're telling me that there's no money being made at all, the management company's taking that money from the pizza parlor that's paying them directly and then pretending that they never got paid, and then they're coming to me for their percentage, which I owe them regardless of whether I got paid. I owe them a booking fee.

With all this going on, you had mentioned bodyguards. Do you have some sort of personal protection?
I don't want to reveal that, because I don't want your Mark

Starpulse Q&A: Neil Hamburger Discusses Survival And Wonders How The Likes of Dane Cook And Carrot Top Have Succeeded

2007-10-24

https://web.archive.org/web/20080523163631/http://www.starpulse.com/news/index.php/2007/10/24/starpulse_qaamp_a_neil_hamburg_discusses

David Chapmans coming to the show. You don't ask President Bush, "Which guys are the hidden Secret Service guys?" You don't ask that. That's how you end up in jail, or with a visit from the feds.

Have the clubs or the management ever sent their goons after you?

They don't have to be sent out, they're there in the room with me to begin with. The answer is yes. They don't take kindly to paying you. I admit, in some cases, you've got seven people in the audience at two dollars a ticket. I'm probably not going to be getting too much money out of these guys. But in other cases, the venues are quite full, and they always have an excuse. "Well, we had to spend money on a sound man. Two hundred fifty dollars to hire a sound man." Well, I'd like to meet the soundman, because I'm standing there with a microphone with a Radio Shack cable plugged into a big speaker. Where's the soundman who's getting the two hundred fifty dollars they're taking out of my pay? And in some cases, the pay that I'm entitled to, they say, "Well, you had seven tickets at two dollars each, that's fourteen dollars, minus two hundred fifty dollars for the sound man. And then we have to budget for the food, the pizza and all that, so that's minus another fourteen ninety-nine. It looks to me like you owe us two hundred fifty seven dollars."

So are you saying that it's not that the management has goons to send after you as much as the management is goons.

Exactly. I can't name names here.

That's a very efficient business model, to combine the muscle with the brains.

These guys know what they're doing. You talk to other comedians. Ask them. You'll hear the same story from all of them that you're hearing from me, unless they're too cowardly to talk about it, or too busy instead promoting their sitcoms.

Who are some comedians I should speak to if I want to get started on this?

All of them, any of them. They all know about this. Not so much Carrot Top, he's probably getting paid. He's getting paid quite well. He's probably in with this whole mob, honestly.

What has Carrot Top got that you haven't got?

I don't know. He's got nothing. He's got those trunks full of all that crap. He goes to the ninety-nine cent store and buys whatever is on sale there and drags that out on stage and says, "Look at this. You can use this to fish with," or whatever. He brings out some duck tape, and everyone laughs. And he brings out a box of Sun brand detergent-- you know Sun, sort of a low-cost laundry detergent-- he brings out a box of that and says, "Look here. Maybe Neil Hamburger can use this to wash his mouth out after telling those dirty jokes," and everyone laughs. And then he brings out-- what else do they have at the ninety-nine cent store? Adapter to plug your cell phone into the car, except they're selling those adapters for cell phones that haven't existed in ten years, so basically it's a useless piece of electronic crap. So Carrot Top brings that out and says, "What do we have here? Let's see. Maybe this is a walkie talkie for you to all go fuck yourself," and then everyone laughs. And then he brings out a package of some old candy that's gone bad, a gelatinous sort of gummy bear type candy that's too hard to sell for a dollar ninety-nine, so it's at the ninety-nine cent store, and he brings that out and he says, "Look at here. It's a whole package of dildos for mice," and everyone's just laughing at the prop comedy. It's a very cheap thing to do, and it's a very terrible thing to do, and I just read verbatim some of his jokes, and you weren't laughing at all. So that's where I don't understand how he can get off being a multi-millionaire, while guys like myself are struggling just to buy the fuel to get to the next town.

What about some of these other comedians, like Dane Cook? He's gotten his comeuppance. All of his movies are terrible.

They're terrible, but the guy's made plenty of money off of them. He probably thinks they're good. Him and his mother, his grandmother, maybe his sister thinks they're good. But I don't think that Jessica Alba [sic], I don't think that she thought that was so good. Having to make out with him? I mean, geez. You think actresses are overpaid, and then you see they've got to kiss Dane Cook's lips. Then you realize actresses are underpaid at a couple million dollars a film. Poor Jessica Alba, that's tough work. But for him, why is he getting paid? He's got his lips all over Jessica Alba's breasts and that whole thing, and they're paying him for that. And he stunk the whole movie up with the gags that didn't work, and he has awful presence, and then he gets paid. That's kind of strange. It's the equivalent of, if you're dying of bowel cancer, and you're in the hospital just shitting everywhere, your ass is just blown out, and then there's a nurse that comes with a bucket and cleans this mess up. And you're getting paid, and she's getting paid. No. You shouldn't get paid. She should get paid all the money. She's dealing with the mess. You don't get paid. You should be paying her. That's what it is with the Dane Cook thing. He's getting paid to stink this movie up. Jessica Alba's getting paid to have to deal with the stink. It's a very unfair model.

It seems like in this interview, I think we've made a lot of headway in terms of me collecting more data for this investigative pursuit that I'm been doing. But I wanted to know, when we spoke previously, you'd mentioned-- I'm just going to quote directly-- "I hope they don't find me too late. That's something to keep in mind, too, that by the time they discover me, there might be nothing left. That's what happened to Jesus. That guy was not as popular when he was around as he is now." I know the Beatles made the mistake of comparing themselves to Jesus, and it set them back a little bit in their career. Did this comment have any effect on your

Starpulse Q&A: Neil Hamburger Discusses Survival And Wonders How The Likes of Dane Cook And Carrot Top Have Succeeded

2007-10-24

https://web.archive.org/web/20080523163631/http://www.starpulse.com/news/index.php/2007/10/24/starpulse_qaamp_a_neil_hamburg_discusses

career?
You know, I didn't think of that, but maybe that explains the poor attendance last night. We did have a bad show last night up in Pasa Robla, where I've been playing for years. Nobody came. I don't know. The nightclub was about three blocks from a church. And this is why I'm warning you about what you write. You've got to be careful. This isn't the Middle Ages, where you had freedom of press. This is 2007. Things are a little different now. And what you write, you know. You could end up with one of those ball and chains that they have on the foot when you're breaking up slabs of concrete. That could be you. Or me.

At the same time, they also say that there's no such thing as bad publicity.
I know they said that, but look what happened to this movie with Jessica Abla and Dane Cook. That got some bad publicity. I don't even think it's still playing in the theaters. What do you make of that? "There's no bad publicity," tell that to the guys who spent all the money paying those two to mug it up in that awful movie. You've got some investors jumping off the bridge there. Go down to the bottom of the-- what's the bridge from Saturday Night Fever, that bridge? The big bridge that hooks Staten Island up to New York. I'm not a geography guy; I'm a comedian. But go down to the bottom of that bridge right now. You'll probably see all the producers of Good Luck Chuck, executive producers. I bet it's just a big pile down there of blood and guts. Those are the guys there whose names are in the credits of that movie. It's already out of the theater. Who's paying for the billboards all over the place? I'm seeing them everywhere, with that guy's big, ugly face. No one wants to see that.

You did mention that Dane Cook's mother enjoys his work. What does the Family Hamburger think of your career?
They're mad at me for disgracing the family name. Didn't you hear, one of my records, we did a whole routine about that. It's not a good situation. They're not proud. Would you be proud if your child every year had a negative income, every year going deeper and deeper into debt? It's nothing to be proud of. You could say, "I was on stage at Madison Square Garden last year. Isn't that something to be proud of." And you know what they'd say to me? "Neil, there were a whole team of janitors on stage at Madison Square Garden as well last year. So what?" Do you think anyone's proud of the guy that mops the semen off the stage after an Eric Clapton concert? Nobody's proud of him. He probably spent just as much time on stage as Clapton did, though. Big deal.

What is it that your family lineage is in terms of occupation? What have they got that makes them think they're so much better than a comedian?
They're bureaucrats, basically. They work government type administrative jobs.. So they don't have a sense of humor, really. Sometimes you'll get the odd joke in the family at Thanksgiving or whatever, but I don't go to the Thanksgiving dinners anymore, because I'm too busy on stage at that time of year. And that's a big time for me, because I have a whole Thanksgiving set, this whole cranberry sauce routine, that's extremely popular around Thanksgiving. So that's when they have a lot of bookings.

So they haven't said that they're proud of you?
No. No, they haven't. They definitely haven't.

Well, I'm proud of you, Neil.
Well, thank you. That's more than we usually get. I'll take it. Believe me, I will take that. Thank you.

Interview by Ben Kharakh
Starpulse.com contributing writer

The Washington Post

November 13, 2014

https://archive.is/jeR44

EXPRESS

Neil Hamburger on the Black Cat, 'First of Dismay' and Dave Grohl

Comedian Gregg Turkington gets deep into character as Neil Hamburger. (Robyn Von Swank)

By Dean Essner

November 13, 2014 at 6:05 a.m. EST

Andy Kaufman is no longer with us, but his spirit lives on in Neil Hamburger, the alter ego of comedian Gregg Turkington. Like Kaufman's iconic alter ego, the lounge singer Tony Clifton, Hamburger seems to exist separately from his creator (even if they share a body). Hamburger has his own phone number and answering machine message. He's got his own backstory and a polarizing, anti-comedy way of telling jokes. He also has his own, distinctive look: thick-rimmed glasses, a bow tie and a messy comb-over. See for yourself on Monday when Hamburger performs stand-up at the Black Cat.

You seem to play the Black Cat every other year. Does the place hold any special allure for you?

The audiences there are consistently top-notch. They seem like the most enthusiastic, most intelligent, and just the most fun-loving audiences you get all year. Then you combine that with a nice sound system. You'd be surprised at how poor a sound system could be when all you're trying to do is speak.

Your new record, "First of Dismay," features original music and comedy. Are you considering a side career as a singer?

Well, most people don't want a whole album of my music. They prefer the stand-up comedy. So the idea was to turn the whole thing into a combination of stand-up comedy and music ... like a night out at the nightclub. We've got some country-western songs. We've got a disco song regarding some defective trash bags. And then, of course, the extended comedy segments.

On Twitter, you're critical of popular bands and corporations, particularly Taco Bell.

I believe Taco Bell should hire me as the world's first celebrity health inspector to go in to check the temperature of the beans, look for vermin on the floor.

Many of your jokes poke fun at pop artists and celebrities. How do people respond?

We play mostly music nightclubs, and the people are very familiar with music, so we have to tailor the act to those crowds. If I were to do a joke about a lovable little rabbit and a talking squirrel and how they were fighting over a 50-pound bag of potatoes, kids might like it, but these adults wouldn't be interested.

I'm going to name someone associated with D.C. and I want you to tell me what comes to mind, starting with Bill Nye.

He's a good guy and doing good work but I'm wondering, "Why aren't you in the laboratory figuring out a cure for polio? Why are you on TV?"

Dave Grohl.

In danger of ruining his career through overexposure. It's time for a vacation.

Maury Povich.

Now you're just talking about your garbage people.

Meet the man behind Neil Hamburger

In case you're still confused: Neil Hamburger is a character given life by comedian Gregg Turkington, left. You can see Turkington playing someone who is not Hamburger in Rick Alverson's hipster-critiquing film "The Comedy," or on Tim Heidecker's Web-based "Siskel and Ebert" send-up "On Cinema at the Cinema," where he plays a VCR purist who loves "The Hobbit" a little too much. Before comedy, Turkington played in punk and avant-garde bands and ran the San Francisco-based Amarillo Records in the '90s.

Black Cat, 1811 14th St. NW; Mon., 8 p.m., $12.

The Boston Phoenix

Laugh tracks

Rocking the comedy underground with Neil Hamburger, David Cross, and Jon Wurster

BY TED DROZDOWSKI

Issue Date: May 27 - June 2, 2005

https://bostonphoenix.com/boston/music/other_stories/documents/04711396.asp

NEW BREED? Neil Hamburger's style of humor has been brand 'anti-comedy,' 'alt-comedy,' and 'indie comedy.'

"Why, ahem . . . why, ah-harg," the comedian says, clearing his throat as he tries to get out a final joke. "Why did Julia Roberts rub shit on her vagina?"

The audience at Great Scott reacts with a mix of silent repulsion and stunned laughter.

"Because she was horny," he deadpans, then says a quick good night and shambles off stage.

Thus ends a typical night with Neil Hamburger, a sweaty, depressive, goggle-eyeglasses-wearing, comb-over-sporting nebbish in a black tuxedo whose brand of humor is a calculatedly impossible-to-acquire taste. Earlier in his set a week ago Saturday, he served up jokes about AIDS and celebrities. "Why," he asked "did Robert Redford stick his cock in a jar of Newman's Own spaghetti sauce?"

"Why?" his devotees and some confused audience members shouted back.

"Robert Redford and Paul Newman have been friends for 40 years," he answered, raising his snarky voice to an isn't-it-obvious pitch. "He'd never use a competitor's product."

Courtney Love may be an easy target, but Hamburger nonetheless took aim. "What's the difference between Courtney Love and the American flag?"

"What?" we yelled.

"It would never be appropriate to urinate on the American flag," he replied, then turned away from the audience and muttered "Oh boy" into the microphone, followed by an audible sigh and another "uh, hurgh." And when a young woman's heckling grew too loud for the third time, he suggested the audience help hang her from the rafters so we could watch her soil her jeans before she died. "Yes, young lady," he barked. "We will watch you shit your pants tonight."

Hamburger's brand of humor wouldn't fly at your average Giggles or Laugh Shack, but in a rock room in Allston on a Saturday night, he's appropriately inappropriate. Maybe. "For the true Neil Hamburger experience you don't want to see a show in San Francisco or Austin or Boston but in West Virginia," he explains. "When you hav a crowd where one percent of the people know what's going on and the rest hate it, it becomes a battle. If you want to be entertained, you can stand anywhere in the club and listen to the reactions to the jokes I'm telling. That might be much funnier than the jokes.

If Hamburger's observation seems unusually self-aware for a comic who' said to have cut his teeth on the Monday-night California pizza-parlor circuit and cable-access TV, that's because he's as much performance artist as stand-up. He's the stage persona of humorist, indie-rocker (San Francisco's tongue-in-cheek Zip Code Rapists), prank caller, and anagram-book co-author (*Warm Voice Rearranged* on Drag City) Gregg Turkington. And though his Hamburger persona might seem alone on stage, Turkington is in good company. Turkington/Hamburger is part of a flourishing breed of comic whose style of humor has been branded "anti-comedy," "alt-comedy," and "indie comedy" — this last a term that one of the style's early proponents, David Cross, now sneers at. It's not easy to define given that it embraces prank phone calls, pseudonymous performances, video and audio recordings, and traditional stand-up with an untraditional point of view.

What it isn't, as Hamburger's live performances and the concept albums he records for the Drag City label make clear, is predictable. The comics who slip into this category often lace their observations with absurdism and wield sharp-edged satire aimed at the underground rock/art scene. Their fans are usually young, smart, and well informed about music, art, and politics. Some, like Jon Wurster, who's released a hilarious series of CDs on his own StereoLaffs label (www.sterolaffs.com), are musicians who tour with rock bands or play at rock venues like Great Scott and the Middle East in Cambridge, where Eugene Mirman, another member of this camp, will appear on June 20 and 21 on a bill with Langhorne Slim.

"Too often at comedy clubs, you get the tourists who are out to have a good time, and they're usually disappointed by me," Hamburger notes. "At comedy

The Boston Phoenix

Laugh tracks

Rocking the comedy underground with Neil Hamburger, David Cross, and Jon Wurster

BY TED DROZDOWSKI

Issue Date: May 27 - June 2, 2005

https://bostonphoenix.com/boston/music/other_stories/documents/04711396.asp

clubs, people have been trained to laugh at anything." Of course, Hamburger can put a stop to that the minute he conjures Robert Redford unzipping his fly as he heads for the pantry, to say nothing of Julia Roberts.

Boston was one of the ignition points for this strain of humor beginning in the mid 1980s, and David Cross held some of the matches. Today, Cross is best known for his work on HBO's *Mr. Show with Bob and David* and the sit-com *Arrested Development*, though he's also had his own TV specials and made albums for the Sub Pop label and appeared in several movies. He's even written rock criticism for Pitchfork: you can find his humorous essays at http://pitchforkmedia.com/features/artistlists/c/cross_david-05/.

Fifteen years ago, however, he was a struggling comedian developing his own Cross Comedy troupe in the Hub "This whole scene started with a bunch of friends who were hanging ou and playing softball and drinking beer together," he says over the phone fror his New York home. "Some of us wen into comedy and others into music, bu the common background and reference points were there." Of course, he adds, comedians and musicians have played bills together "since the days of vaudeville." But in the first three decades of the rock era opening for a band could be suicidal. "That's because the packages were put together by managers, and often the comedians and bands had nothin in common. Today, the musicians anc comedians put their own packages together, so they know it's right for their audiences."

In the late '80s, Cross Comedy begar doing shows in Boston with groups lik the Cave Dogs, Gigolo Aunts, the Bags, and Scruffy the Cat at the Charles Playhouse, the House of Borax performance space, and lofts along Thayer Street. "Now that's not as unique anymore. There are more comics who are starting out in that scene who grew up attending shows in it rather than having taken part in starting the scene."

You could think of Jon Wurster as embodying the rock/comedy axis. He was the drummer in Superchunk in 1993 when he met Tom Scharpling, who has become his straight-man foil. Bonding over a love of music and a skewed sense of humor, they hit on the idea of Wurster's calling in to Scharpling's radio show on Jersey City–based free-form station WFMU, posing as everything from a rock scribe to a corporate rock stooge to Scharpling's borderline psycho father. The results, which zap every variety of bonehead, have been collected on the CDs *Rock, Rot & Rule*, *New Hope for the Ape-Eared*, and *Chain Fights, Beer Busts and Service with a Grin*. A fourth, *Hippie Justice*, is due in July.

"Often what we do is sparked by something stupid people have said or something we see on TV," he points out. *Rock, Rot & Rule*, for example, was inspired by Oprah Winfrey's remarks after defeating a lawsuit by the American Beef Council. "She said, 'Freedom, the holy rings have rocked,' which we thought was one of the dumbest things we'd ever heard." From there, Wurster and Scharpling developed the character of Ronald Thomas Clontle, author of the fictitious book *Rock, Rot & Rule*, which rates bands and musicians. Neil Young rots; the Beatles rock; Madonna rules — and from there a battle of æsthetics and idiocy plays out with callers joining in.

One of the duo's best routines is "Mother 13," in which Wurster poses as a rock star wanna-be from a band of that name who by mistake calls Scharpling's show instead of a "Morning Zoo" program and then expounds on the importance of playing product-tie-in ClearChannel radio-station-sponsored concerts like "Dr. Pepper Presents the Sounds of Tomorrow Today." It's a wicked satire of the world of corporate music and its corruption of creativity. And like all of the duo's dialogues, it's so full of details, wry wit, and acute observations that it's damn near impossible to explain with any justice.

Hamburger's recordings are vastly different from his live performances, which could play in the lounge of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* as a warm-up for Isabella Rossellini's beset crooner. His latest, *Great Moments at DiPressa's Pizza House with TV Comic Neil Hamburger*, tells the story of his rise on the pizza circuit and his emotional collapse and pathetic partial resurrection. The humor, with its half-hearted jokes and Hamburger's broken-down, perpetually beleaguered persona, is perfect for our age of diminished expectations — a time when we've been so sapped and defeated that there isn't even enough energy in our collective consciousness to muster up one-liners that cross the line from crude to clever. Nonetheless, there's a perverse genius at play in his off-key repertoire.

Hamburger/Turkington says his notion of making comedy albums goes back to the 1970s. In particular, he cites the wholly realized tales of the *National Lampoon* troupe and Albert Brooks as role models. "You could listen to those records and really learn something from them. Today, all we have to listen

The Boston Phoenix

Laugh tracks

Rocking the comedy underground with Neil Hamburger, David Cross, and Jon Wurster

BY TED DROZDOWSKI

Issue Date: May 27 - June 2, 2005

https://bostonphoenix.com/boston/music/other_stories/documents/04711396.asp

to is people like Jeff Foxworthy, who just mention something we've all experienced, like getting drops on your shoes at the urinal, to get a laugh. A lot of comedians don't feel they have to construct jokes or develop original ideas anymore. They're lazy."

Nobody would call Hamburger lazy. At Great Scott, he was called "dickhead," "asshole," and "fuckhead," but nobody called him lazy.

SubMerge mag

EVERYONE'S A CRTIC

BLAKE GILLESPIE March 26th, 2012

https://submergemag.com/comedy/everyones-a-crtic/

Photo by Robyn Von Swank

Neil Hamburger takes on Shakespeare, prank calls and hecklers with panache… more or less

Neil Hamburger might seem as though he was freed from a cryogenic crypt. His classic vaudeville act is both archaic and a fittingly appropriate counterstrike to modern humor. In late March he returns to the Sacramento Comedy Spot. If you saw him previously and it was over your head, this article is for you. If you've never seen him perform and have tickets, this article is for you too.

Those old enough to remember Tony Clifton wreaking havoc on late-night television and concert stages in the '70s should think of Neil Hamburger as being cut from the same washed-up, beer- and sweat-stained tuxedo cloth. He's an anti-hero with celebrity worship in the crosshairs. If at any point during his set you find it difficult to accept his reality, take comfort in knowing he's not entirely real. Unlike Clifton, though, Hamburger is on our side rather than out to sully our evening on the town. On the phone he expressed aspirations to reach the same heights as Abbott and Costello or Laurel and Hardy, which is why he does 399 shows (allegedly) a year.

"Certainly would like to get the point of the same recognition as those guys," he said. "It was a good situation for Abbott and Costello. What wasn't so good was when they passed away. That was a problem for them. Fortunately, they'd done quite a few things before that we'll always treasure."

On stage, Hamburger is a glum, middle-aged, tuxedo-clad man, with greasy comb-over hair, awkwardly sized glasses and a rasp magnified by a ghost lodging in his throat he perpetually pauses to clear–as if he's working up a world record-tying loogie. As real as he appears, he's an act finely tuned over a nearly 20-year span. Before there was Hamburger, there was Gregg Turkington, a punk rocker and label head from Australia. He's practically dead these days, consumed by the Hamburger persona; so dead, I insisted clarification on precisely who I would be speaking with–Neil or Gregg–before accepting the assignment.

Talking to Neil, I wanted to ask, "Is Gregg there? Is he somewhere in there? Can Gregg come out?" like I was a psychiatrist coaxing a multi-personality disorder patient to let me speak to the host. I didn't though, because talking with Neil was too much fun. He was professional and just as uncertain about expectations as I was. When we wrapped our interview his parting words were:

"Good luck. I hope I was able to give you the answers you were looking for. You never know what people need. I do hope this leads to some sort of prize or some sort of award for you. I do appreciate the time."

It was unexpected, considering Hamburger is notoriously cranky. If an audience member doesn't respond to his inquiry, they are dubbed a "zipper lips." If an unruly heckler dares challenge Hamburger, relentless throat-clearing sounds drown out their end, until Neil is ready to fire his snarling comeback. On his show *Poolside Chats*, call-ins are futile and mostly result in Hamburger shouting obscenities at a phone and slamming the receiver. But, the afternoon of our chat, Hamburger was pleasant, since he considered me to be "a nice polite and reasonable person with some good questions."

In a lot of the clips I watched leading up to this interview you seemed to be quite cranky. I was somewhat nervous about this interview, considering how you respond to phone calls on *Poolside Chats*.

Well I think it depends on what you get. If you get someone throwing old frozen waffles at you and yelling out your punch lines, well the crankiness will set in. It also depends on the time of day. It's certainly easier to be cranky late at night or early in the morning. During the daytime when I'm just driving from show to show, it's a pretty pleasant day

SubMerge mag

EVERYONE'S A CRTIC

BLAKE GILLESPIE March 26th, 2012

https://submergemag.com/comedy/everyones-a-crtic/

out...so I would say no, I'm not cranky right now.

You seem to thrive off the shouts from hecklers. I feel as though your style baits them some. Deep down do you love it?
I wouldn't say I encourage, but I'm prepared for them. Honestly some of these hecklers are just so witless and plain annoying that there's no reason to encourage that. Some of these people are committing the equivalent of crapping on the floor of the nightclub, you know? Somebody has something clever to say that's a whole other story, but that's not always what you get.

Plus what a comedian finds clever and the average audience member finds clever probably greatly differs.
Well, let's put it this way. When you get guys that come out and they go on YouTube and they see the show from the night before and they come out to yell the punch lines ahead of time. That's not really heckling. That's just shitty. Nobody cares for that. So those are the sorts of folks I'm talking about that we have no use for.

Do you have any new comedy records coming out?
We just did one with Jack White, you know? It just came out last month. There's a couple 7-inch singles as well. So yeah, lot of new records.

What was it like working with Jack White?
The man is a true professional and knows what he wants. He knows how to put on a great event. We recorded it live, and he's got a studio there in Nashville. We did the show and it came out as a record in a very quick turnaround. Just an all-around pleasure. I wish there were more folks in the business like this, but as you know a lot of them aren't. You get your Britney Spears and this sort of garbage. It's not always so nice.

You've got a couple film roles coming up. You're in *Hamlet A.D.D.* What was it like working with Shakespearean material?
It's a strange film. I haven't seen it, but it's an animated film with live actors. I guess, they do it with this modern technology and you're interacting with cartoon characters. It's hard to say. It was fun to be a part of it. We were in front of a green screen. Certainly, I was not actually interacting with these cartoons, but I will be when it comes out. That's something to look forward to.

You got your start doing prank phone calls. Do you ever do them now for nostalgia's sake?
You know, sometimes I'll get on the phone and do an interview or order a pizza or something. Nowadays, you get the death penalty for making prank calls, so you really can't do that anymore. They changed the rule. It's instant death.

I was unaware of that.
Oh yeah, check the news. You'll see. I guess they prosecuted the first couple people and started the executions. There are some human rights activists and things that say it's a bit extreme punishment, but you know, unless it goes to the Supreme Court and is overturned, that's what we're stuck with.

What celebrities are in your crosshairs these days?
Well, they all are really. Most of these folks are not the best people you may come across in your travels. A lot of these people are really quite unpleasant, quite overpaid and overexposed. Some of these movies really break your heart, if you get a look at this junk. To see these people thriving off poisoning our children with their bad films and their bad everything, that will break your heart again. Some of the bad music, I don't know if you've heard some of this music they've got... It sounds like somebody crapping into a porcelain bowl. You know, they put a techno beat over it and that's the new hit single. I'm sorry, that's not my idea of a good song.

Neil Hamburger will play the Sacramento Comedy Spot on Friday, March 30, 2012. Tickets are $15 and can be purchased through http://saccomedyspot.com/. If you go (and you should), do yourself a favor, and leave the jokes to the professional.

Big Cheese

SAT 9/10You know you've made it when people start impersonating you. But comedian Neil Hamburger admits he's a little nervous about seeing his clones at the 1st Annual Neil Hamburger Fan Convention on Saturday, September 10. "I've heard about people dressing as me for Halloween," says the tuxedo-clad comic, who...

By Niki D'Andrea, Benjamin Leatherman, Clay McNear and Julie Peterson

September 8, 2005

https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/arts-culture/big-cheese-6399126/

SAT 9/10

You know you've made it when people start impersonating you. But comedian Neil Hamburger admits he's a little nervous about seeing his clones at the 1st Annual Neil Hamburger Fan Convention on Saturday, September 10. "I've heard about people dressing as me for Halloween," says the tuxedo-clad comic, who specializes in dorky comedy. "But I haven't seen any impersonators. I'm afraid they'll outdo me and I'll be out of a job. That's what happened to Elton John, you know."

But for Hamburger fans, there's no mistaking the real deal. The message boards of the unofficial Neil Hamburger Web site (**www.neilhamburger.tvheaven.com**) brim with accolades and affection from posters who happily identify themselves as his "fan(atics)."

"Some of 'em do have emotional problems. I don't know if that qualifies them as fanatics," Hamburger says. "But they can get very enthusiastic, and it's nice to have a handful out of a few hundred people who just love the show. Hopefully, at a fan convention, we'll get all the people who love me and not the sourpusses."

In addition to Hamburger's performance, the convention features trivia games, a pizza contest, and performances by local rockers Tales From the Birdbath, the Bindle Stiffs, and Brodie Hubbard.

Laughlines: Neil Hamburger

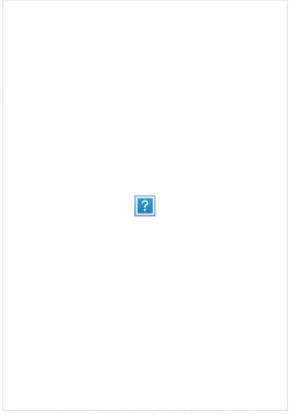
John Sekerka

September 29th, 2005

https://web.archive.org/web/20081208221054/http://www.hour.ca/stage/stage.aspx?iIDArticle=7305

FAST FOOD MESSIAH

Neil Hamburger, self-proclaimed "America's Funnyman," continues to bring his pained stand-up act to the masses despite sporadic threats and general indifference. If anything, Hamburger is persistent. Armed with little more than a greasy comb-over, thick black glasses, a Sally Ann wardrobe and some stiff drinks, he defies the odds by releasing records, touring the world, and spreading his train wreck comedy. If you like to wince, feel awkward, or enjoy hecklers in action, then Hamburger's your man.



I said no anchovies! Neil Hamburger on a classy pitstop
photo: Simone Turkington

Hamburger, who may or may not be indie record mogul Greg Turkington, is the closest thing we have these days to Andy Kauffman (in his obnoxious Tony Clifton alter ego mode, though more on the nebbish side). I had a chance meeting by phone with a not surprisingly very available Hamburger to discuss his latest predicaments.

Is there a great rush of euphoria when he hits the stage?

"No because I'm not on any drugs. It's a feeling of profound sadness, mixed with professionalism and a willingness to get the job done. All the troubles, misery, addiction, romantic failings, lost jobs, car accidents, all the things that make life unbearable-my job is to come out and let you people forget about that for 45 minutes, to have you laugh until your sides are splitting. You leave with a clean palate to go out and enjoy life. As a result I'm carrying a lot of people's problems on my shoulders, but isn't that what Christ did?"

In spite of himself, Neil is fast-tracking it to stardom.

"We just did a movie! Have you heard of a Hollywood actor by the name of Jack Black? Well he put me into his new movie. It's probably a 30-second role, provided they don't cut it completely, but I play a young comedian named Neil Hamburger, coincidentally. So good things can happen to bad people, you just have to keep lighting candles. You have to believe in something. Anything really, it doesn't really matter. Light a candle, open a fortune cookie, and your dreams may come true ... or not. Usually they don't actually.

"For every Britney Spears you get five million untalented blond girls with false breasts who end up as prostitutes instead of top-selling pop starlets. But you know, she kept the candle burning, and that's all I'm asking of you guys. Although the fire laws are strict with the nightclubs in Canada. So maybe you could put something in boldface telling people to **keep the candles at home**. I think the club would appreciate it."

Neil Hamburger will be at Mavericks on Rideau Street, Saturday October 1, at 8 p.m.

COMEDY: Indie comedians leave the club behind

John Wenzel

Nov. 20, 2006

https://www.recordonline.com/story/lifestyle/2006/11/20/comedy-indie-comedians-leave-club/53016641007/

Comedian Gregg Turkington and his alter ego/character Neil Hamburger toured rock clubs before Cross. A San Francisco musician and writer, Turkington parlayed Hamburger's anti-comedy prank calls into a record deal with Drag City, a Chicago label that boasts artists including Joanna Newsom and Bonnie "Prince" Billy. Former "Will & Grace" writer and comic Laura Kightlinger also calls the label home.

But like Cross, Hamburger refuses to take credit for starting the trend.

"I wasn't the first, it's just that there was a period where no one was doing this," he said. "If you go back to the 1970s, groups like Fleetwood Mac would have a comedian open for them, and of course your great singers — Frank Sinatra, Jack Jones — always had comedians open for them."

Stop Smiling magazine

God Bless America['s Funnyman Neil Hamburger]

Neil Hamburger is interviewed by Ms. Boni Jergen, his biggest fan (and webmaster of the Unofficial Neil Hamburger Website). April 28, 2004

https://web.archive.org/web/20050110124725/stopsmilingonline.com/features_detail.html?id1=87

Stop Smiling: Neil, you perform 365 shows a year, and have the crowd in stitches every night. How do you do it?

Neil Hamburger: Well, first of all, let me say that I have no choice in the matter.

SS: OK…

NH: But, uh, yes, I think that the key is to stay in shape. It is easy to get run down on this type of a schedule, and with the people yelling and spitting, the germs can easily lodge themselves in your lungs which can lead to sickness. I eat a lot of canned fruit. Because it is canned, you don't have to worry about spoilage in the heat, or insects, fruit flies, that type of thing. Also you are not breaking any quarantine laws when you take it into different states, as would be the case with fresh fruit. And the fiber, and the nutrients, and minerals—they're all still there. I also read passages from Lee Iacocca, when I'm waiting for the traffic lights to change. He has a couple of books out that I've found helpful.

SS: Neil, your albums are the funniest things I've ever heard.

NH: Thank you. I don't hear that often.

SS: Well, I also love the stage show.

NH: There's a thrill that you get from live performing that you just don't get when someone's listening to your album in the other room.

SS: What I wanted to know was what you had in store for the future for us fans.

NH: More of the same. It never ends. I'm booked up through 2005, things are very very busy, ever since I signed up with this new computer-operated booking agency. The tours are booked completely by computer, and the phone calls are made by an automated voice system. So it's sort of an unforgiving computer, in terms of the scheduling. And some of the shows that they book turn out to be just kids who are fooling around, you know, when the computer calls them by mistake, these little brats just press "2" which is the yes button, to every question the computer asks. And they put in really high guarantees, so here I think I've got a show that pays $55,555, but then I get to the town and find out there's no show at all, and it's just these kids playing around. So there are some drawbacks to this.

SS: I know what you mean. I have been taking computer classes for a couple of years now at Mesa Community College so that I could do websites, which is the biggest growing job market. And computers can be difficult, especially the printers which are always jamming. But you know what, Neil, I did your website originally as my first quarter assignment, and I got an A-! So I owe you for that opportunity.

NH: Aha. Well, that's great.

SS: Now I'm working on a new website, a dating website for pet-lovers who are also single. I'm sick of answering singles ads and then the guys come to pick me up for the date, and they lose the interest right away because of my dogs jumping on them. Bananas, she's the youngest one, and she's very excitable.

NH: OK.

SS: But they're good dogs, Bananas and Miltie. I took them on a road trip to see some of your shows last year.

NH: OK.

SS: And Miltie kept chewing on the gear shift, you know, of the car.

NH: Right.

SS: Which I don't care about because I'm not materialistic about things. But when we were getting into Albuquerque and he was chewing on it, because it's a hard rubber, which is good for their teeth…to chew on. Miltie's a big dog, so he needs the exercise.

NH: OK.

SS:…Anyway, he actually changed the gears with his teeth right there in rush hour traffic, from fourth gear to second, which isn't what I wanted. Meanwhile, Bananas is up in the back window of the car so I can't see out of it, and he's jumping around and barking at the trucks, and, well, it got a little scary there for a minute. And this was right after they'd had a big car crash on the radio, so it makes you think about things differently.

NH: Right. And that was an important show for me in Albuquerque, because you had a lot of the college-aged kids out, which is the crowd to aim for these days, if you're trying to make it in this business.

SS: Well, I go to college too, but I'm 40. Or 40-ish, really.

NH: Aha.

SS: But it's a community college so we have all types. Lots of the Mexicans go there to learn English. I work with some of these guys at the dry cleaners I work at, part-time, until I get this pet-lovers dating thing going.

NH: Right--I wanted to thank you for doing that dry cleaning for me for free when I was passing through town.

SS: No problem! Just don't tell my boss. They won't print that in this paper, will they?

NH: They can edit anything, nowadays. But I did appreciate that. The dry cleaning was high quality. You know, when you never have a day off, it's hard to get the tuxedo cleaned, and more often than I'd like I have to rely on steam-cleaning it the old way, which is to leave it in the bathroom overnight with the shower running on hot, and the door closed.

SS: Yes, but that's not really going to do the job properly. The garment retains a lot of of the soilage. Neil, turning back to my questions, what have you got planned for the new year? Anything big that we should know about?

NH: There was a week booked at an Indian casino lounge, but they lost their gaming license so I don't know. But something else will come up.

SS: I know it will.

NH: It would be nice to have a day off at some point next year, but I guess you can't really do that these days, to stay competitive with the younger comedians.

SS: They're not as funny as you Neil.

NH: Thank you.

SS: No, I tell you, I cancelled my cable TV, because one, I couldn't afford it on my salary anymore, but two, the stuff on the Comedy Channel wasn't really as funny as it used to be. I'm glad you put out that DVD now [Neil Hamburger Live At The Phoenix Greyhound Park] because I can always watch that if I need to be uplifted with laughter.

NH: Which is the point, really.

SS: How is it being on a DVD, compared to being on a CD?

NH: It's different.

SS: I think that would be a dream come true for most people.

NH: Thank you.

Visit Boni Jergen's Unofficial Neil Hamburger Website at http://neilhamburger.tvheaven.com

Neil Hamburger's latest CD "Laugh Out Lord" is available from: http://www.dragcity.com

Neil Hamburger's new DVD "Live At The Phoenix Greyhound Park" is available from: http://www.kungfurecords.com

Pop Smear magazine
May/June 1998

https://web.archive.org/web/20060323085753/http://popsmear.com/popculture/features/15/sony.html

NEIL HAMBURGER Player 1

Just because I am a comedian people assume I don't have feelings. But that assumption is wrong, and over the years I have felt terrible about my lack of athletic prowess. My lack of *comedic* prowess is oftentimes my own fault, but the blame for a lack of athletic prowess must rest squarely on the shoulders of the fast food industry. And soft drink manufacturers are at fault, too: there's no reason Pepsi can't add some Vitamin C or B21 or whatever to their cola!

But anyway, due to my hectic career and mediocre physical condition, I have been unable to partake in playing the sport of professional basketball alongside modern legends like Hakeem Olajuwon. Until now! The great people at Sony sent me a Playstation® game console, along with their hottest, most realistic basketball game, NBA Shootout '98, and I am only too happy to shill for them. This thing is fantastic, Sony. And though I would be happy to say whatever they wanted in a paid commercial advertisement situation, the truth of the matter is I'm NOT being paid by Sony and I still love this product!

Sony also has a line of popular record labels and from what I understand, does not currently have a huge success rate with their comedy acts. I hope to someday make a record for the Sony people and change all that. I'm willing to tour to promote it too! And a movie of my life would be great. Do you have a movie production company, Sony? They must, they make all the VCRs. But for now, my job is to just tell you all about my experiences with their GREAT product, the Playstation®, and this dream-like new game (feel free to quote me on that, Sony!) NBA Shootout '98.

First off, I must state that I am unfamiliar with previous editions of NBA Shootout. I also must state that I am unfamiliar with the procedure for installing the Playstation®. The fact that it took me half an hour of trying and still I was unable to make any progress is not due to any flaws in the Playstation®, but has more to do with flaws in my own personality and mind, flaws that 15 years of therapy and 14 years on the stage have not yet completely corrected. However, my manager, Art Huckman, has several estranged children of his own and knew all about this sort of mechanism. With his help, the game was hooked up and ready for action. He made it look as easy as plugging in a lamp, though he did curse a bit when he banged his head on the top of the table getting up too quickly from plugging in the electricity.

Sony also furnished me with an NBA Shootout '98 t-shirt, which I was happy to wear during the playing of this game, as I had spilled tomato sauce on my white button-down pajama top. A hat was also provided and I'm wearing it now. I'll try to wear it while on tour.

OK. Game set up. We're ready to roll.

With NBA Shootout '98 you can play against all the famous National players like Shawn Kemp, Jason Kidd, and Dennis Rodman. I don't know who these people are, but Art Huckman says that they're quite famous, and indeed one thing I noticed while playing this game: when the famous players are on the screen, Neeeeeeillllllllll Haaaammmmmmbbbbbuuuurrrrgggeerrrrr's gonna lose!

This game doesn't fool around. There's a book as big as the Bible to go through to figure out how to play it. Of course, if you're already familiar with the game of basketball, or with these particular players, or with using a Playstation® or similar video game mechanism, you can probably skip the book. It's all new to me and I tried to read through the book as best as I could. Finally, I got restless, wanted to see some flashing lights and move my thumbs, and decided to get the game going.

The good thing about this game is that you have a lot of choices. Players and teams can be chosen or even created! I would've liked to create a one-legged player who ruined the game for his team and cried a lot, but Art Huckman, my manager, insisted we use already existing players and teams and do the job right. I started to create a "Neil Hamburger" player but became impatient (through no fault of the game or of Sony!) and stuck with Art's advice. Nonetheless, it's nice to know that it can be done, and that kids of all ages are doing it across the country at this very moment. Thank you Sony, and thank you Art.

The existing players come in two colors, white and black. I chose some of each, and tried to get a good mix of players alphabetically. Other choices you can make include the type of "dunk" you make, the type of "pass" you make (these are technical terms) and even the year you want to play in, 1997 or 1998. This game thinks of everything. Perhaps Sony should refocus their efforts and be given more control over people's day to day lives.

While playing, I was impressed by the sounds, particularly of the crowd. Crowds this big and this responsive do not come along everyday - trust me! Obviously Sony has done it again! Another thing is that these computerized robotic players look completely human at times, which can be disturbing. If not for the fact that they're on a one-dimensional flat screen, they would be in 3-D. They move and jump around and throw the ball around, and it's all very real and deceptive. I would like to know what kind of money the actual human beings these players are based on are making. What sort of contract, and do you sign in blood? This is sinister stuff.

The advertising in the background as the players run around is not at all realistic, however. They should improve that for future versions. I'm sure that Avis, Coca-Cola, Gatorade, and Marlboro would all be appropriate background advertisements for a game of this nature.

The "camera angles" were phenomenal. It really felt like there were people earning a living filming our little game. Of course, that's not the case, it's robots who are making the killing here, while Americans go unemployed. But that's OK because humans couldn't do the job: it would require them to be packaged with each Playstation® NBA Shootout '98 disc: and most people refuse to be shrinkwrapped! But all incoherent kidding aside, I felt like my every move was being broadcast out to a disappointed TV audience.

I can't tell a lie. And especially not to the good people at Sony. I performed terribly with the game. It was not the fault of the game itself. A bad carpenter blames his tools - but I'm not blaming my tools! (Though I don't happen to be a good carpenter, either.) Maybe I'm just too old, though I'm sure there are old basketball weirdos who probably do very well. I will have to try again. But for now, I lost. It was nice to see all the pretty colors and the exciting action, and to feel like I had the power to control all these people and the game, even though I didn't have the wisdom to do it correctly. (Is this how it feels being the President?) I would like to suggest that this Playstation® technology be put towards a computerized Comedy Laugh-Off. I would further like to suggest myself as Master of Ceremonies for this game. It could easily be incorporated into the Sony Playstation®. Please contact my management so that we can proceed at once with my idea.

Pop Smear magazine
May/June 1998
https://web.archive.org/web/20060323085753/http://popsmear.com/popculture/features/15/sony.html

THE MATCH

Bar-B-QuEHamburgeR

The Neil Hagerty vs. Neil Hamburger Play-Off was strictly a "for Charity" event. Using the player creation screen we assigned their respective personalities to the players. Basically, Hamburger was given to fatigue and passing. Hagerty played a chaotic inside game. Through Hamburger's manager (Art H.) we dialed into the top-secret government phone system known as the internet (Hamburger was on a club tour of Guam and American Samoa, Hagerty was holed-up in a Tennessee hotel) and hooked them up.

	PTS	REBS	AST	STL	SBLK	FG%	3-PT%
HAGERTY:	7	3	1	0	2	3/4	0/1
HAMBERGER:	2	2	8	1	0	1/6	0/2

PARTING THOUGHTS

FROM NEIL HAMBURGER To my opponent "I'm sorry if my poor playing and lack of familiarity with the game made your win 'too easy.' If you ever want to pitch pennies: watch out! I'm unbeatable." To the Youth of the Nation "You are so lucky to have a convenient way to forget your troubles and sublimate your problems. Sony's Playstation is truly a great way to spend Youthful time and energy that could otherwise be spent crying into a pillow." To Sony "You've got a winner here! Now market the Hell out of it! Give me a call, I can do radio and TV ads on short notice."

Buzzine, 2008

Ben Kharakh

https://web.archive.org/web/20100207051802/http://www.buzzine.com/2008/08/neil-hamburger-interview/

Neil Hamburger is no ordinary man. Ordinary men don't perform comedy shows over 400 times a year, upwards of three times a night, in venues ranging in size from pizza places to Madison Square Garden. Ordinary men don't have 21 CDs, singles, DVDs, and EPs to their name. And ordinary men don't have cult followings, catchphrases, or an IMDB page littered with guest-starring roles or appearances on talk shows. Neil Hamburger is no ordinary man, but he wants to be.

Photo ©James Maclennan

Photo ©James Maclennan

Photo ©James Maclennan

Photo ©James Maclennan

He wants off weekends and holidays. He wants time to relax — to not have to worry about where he's going to set up his next cot, how many hundreds of miles he has to drive in a day, or where his dinner's going to come from. He just wants an ordinary life, but he can never have it. Neil is a comedian. He travels the world making people laugh — sometimes for money, sometimes for pizza, and sometimes for nothing. But can you put a price on laughter? Neil's hoping you can, and that it's enough to get him to his next show.

Ben Kharakh: How are you?

Neil Hamburger: Oh, you know, getting ready for the big show tonight.

BK: Where are you performing tonight?

NH: We're playing the regular Paso place. We play up in Paso Robles several times a month. Pizza parlor up there, you know…

BK: Did you get a chance to try that Oreo Pizza that was out a few months ago?

NH: Oh, I heard about that. It's just a cheese pizza with tomato sauce, onions, bell peppers, mushrooms, anchovies, and then instead of pepperoni slices there's Oreo cookies laid out on it. Is that correct?

BK: It's not that exactly, but it looks just as bad. I guess it's got Oreo crust and then it's covered with Oreo filling, and then instead of pepperoni or tomato or what have you it's covered in small pieces of Oreo.

Photo ©Simone Turkington

NH: So the crust is black?

BK: Yes.

NH: And how big is this? Is it twice as big as an Oreo cookie?

BK: At the very least — I think it's about the size of a dinner plate.

NH: Do they cook that? I don't know if they cook Oreos. You know Twinkies, right? Those aren't baked. You know Continental Baking Company? They make Twinkies. The name is a lie because they don't actually bake them. It's basically a chemical reaction that causes them to solidify. If you mix certain chemicals together, they'll turn hard like the Twinkie, and so that's how those are made. Look that up, I'm telling you. Call the company; call your supermarket and ask them. Because maybe with the Oreos it's the same thing…

BK: When you mentioned chemicals I had a thought: You are like a chemist because when you tell your jokes, a chemical reaction occurs within the brain of the audience members as they laugh and get happy.

NH: That is the goal. Too many comedians nowadays are too busy up there just rambling on about their miserable, miserable lives that they forget that nobody's interested in their opinions on current events, and no one's interested in what happened to them at the supermarket. We want the audience to laugh and feel good for once. Because if you've got as many problems as I do, the last thing you want to do is go out and hear a bunch more. What you want to do is to go out and laugh your head off. And yes, you bet it's chemistry. These guys need to tweak what's coming out of their mouths and make sure the people in the audience have a good time and laugh, and get that good feeling. Because, I'll tell you what, there's another way to get that good feeling, and that's with drugs and alcohol. That's a more destructive path than simply going to a Neil Hamburger show.

BK: Certainly. I keep reading articles that say depression is going to overtake heart disease to become America's number one ailment.

NH: Yes, well that's true, but of course a lot of depression is because o heart disease. People are depressed by their heart disease, you see. So the figures are a little misleading. But I do think that people are very very depressed, which is good for my business because it's like this: When you're a plumber, you want to hear that everyone's pipes are clogged. So when Denny's comes out with a larger Grand Slam breakfast, that's good news for plumbers. They know they're going to have overflowing toilets and that type of thing, then business will go up When I pick up the paper and see horrible things going on, I can count on having a few more folks in the audience that night.

BK: How do you feel when you pick up the paper and, instead of horrible things that make people come to your show, you see celebrity gossip?

NH: Well, with most papers that is the headline. You can have this bird flu epidemic that's wiping out millions here in America and you're not getting reporting on that. They're too busy telling you that Debbie Reynolds has bad body odor or whatever, and that's a tragedy.

Buzzine, 2008

Ben Kharakh

https://web.archive.org/web/20100207051802/http://www.buzzine.com/2008/08/neil-hamburger-interview/

BK: Which of the two is the tragedy — the body odor or the bird flu?

NH: I guess the bird flu is probably worse in the long run. Debbie Reynolds is a great entertainer. We don't want to tarnish somebody's reputation that's been built up over a whole lifetime of entertaining people, just because one day there was no Irish Spring in the shower.

BK: Is that an endorsement? Is Irish Spring the soap you use?

NH: Well, I'll tell you what: It will mask most odors but I wouldn't use it. It's real bad. I mean, if you want to talk about depression in America today, a lot of that is caused by the scent of Irish Spring. How many times have you been standing next to someone in a supermarket and that scent is coming out of their arms and from their crotch area or whatever, and you just want to start crying and you don't know why you have that strange sad feeling that you get on a spring day. A lot of times that's traced back to Irish Spring. I don't know if this is something they intended when they came up with the product, but if you talk to anyone working at a suicide hotline, they'll tell you a lot of the cases they see are people who wash with too much Irish Spring. Old Spice is another scent that is known to bring people down permanently.

BK: There have been a few stories in the paper recently of young people committing suicide because their parents didn't buy them a Nintendo or someone broke their iPod.

NH: I believe it. The current batch of people coming out is really not too good. And what can I say? If you lose the Nintendo crowd and the Sony Playstation crowd and all that, it's not going to impact the world much. These are not real good people. They don't come to my shows. And, really, the only thing they're good for is keeping the fast-food chains in business; that's not a good thing either. So if you didn't get a Nintendo or a Sony Playstation and you choose to kill yourself, it sort of makes sense, doesn't it? If something like that tears you up that much, maybe you aren't really right for this world. Maybe the world will be better without you. Now I'm not endorsing suicide in this interview. I don't know what medical journal you're running this in, but I do think some of those people are more trouble than they're worth.

BK: Suicide, your childhood — these are topics mentioned on your latest album *Neil Hamburger Sings Country Winners*. What inspired you to release a country album?

NH: Well, I have a lot of albums out. I certainly have more than a lot of these asshole comedians who are getting all the money and attention. We had a religious album, we had a documentary about a pizza parlor, and we had an album that I did overseas in Southeast Asia. To date we haven't done an all-musical album. I don't know if you're familiar with the actors William Shatner or Telly Savalas or Dennis Weaver, who played McCloud, or Leonard Nimoy, who is a great poet and photographer in addition to his acting and directing. All these men were not known for their singing but for their acting, yet somebody said, "Hey, let's get these guys in the studio and see if we can make a record and make some money off that." Because if you're a fan of Leonard Nimoy, you might want to buy some kind of souvenir of his career, but what is there? Go to a record store and try to find a souvenir of Leonard Nimoy's career. There wasn't one until he started making albums. Now these men, myself included, are not the greatest singers, but we do have known television personalities. So, for myself and those great entertainers, the songs are constructed around the personalities. Nobody's going to listen to a Neil Hamburger singing album or a Leonard Nimoy singing album and expect it to sound as good as Pavarotti. But you will find that the essence of these entertainers comes through in every song. That's what we were hoping to do with the country album.

BK: I think it's remarkable how an artist can make the audience member feel how the artist feels.

NH: That's a wonderful thing, and of course some of them do that and you find that the way they feel is pretty crummy and bland. If you listen to an album by Lane and Merrill Osmond, you might feel the way they feel, but who wants to feel that way?

BK: Of all the subjects on this album that you and I have discussed, the one we've talked about least is your childhood.

NH: I think we've talked about it, but there's not a lot to talk about. I wasn't doing shows then, so I can't tell you about the shows really.

BK: You have a song about your father on the album. What sort of man was he?

NH: Well, that is a song about forgiving alcoholism. There's a lot of alcoholism in the world today and, let's face it, in a lot of cases it's a form of self-medication. I know that people have problems and can't afford a good doctor, and the problems aren't going to get any better. Alcohol, of course, is a wonderful gift if you need to escape from your problems. I think comedy is another escape and less destructive. Putting on an *Abbott and Costello Meets the Mummy* movie is gonna work better for you than drinking a gallon of Tanqueray Gin.

BK: What did your father do for a living?

NH: He was a simple workingman, so he had a lot of different sorts of jobs. Some were mid-level management for food manufacturing companies. Have you heard of Lou's Spices? He was working with the Lou's people for a while in that capacity, not in actually blending the spice, and he worked for a bakery — a mid-range bakery called Van De Kamp's, in Los Angeles. They made a lot of the breads at the supermarket, that sort of thing. He worked for the Banquet people and other food companies. He also worked for the company that makes nails to hammer into wood and things. Again, these are middle management-type jobs. He moved on, working for the Chrysler Company as part of their sales team.

BK: Did you have these things at home, like Chrysler cars, Banquet Dinners, and Lou's Seasonings?

NH: We had a lot of Lou's seasonings, and the Banquet dinners sometimes, but not always. We didn't get a lot of the Chrysler.

BK: What was your mother like?

NH: Well, she was at home a lot she also did work at Lou's a lot. But mostly she was at home watching the soap operas and that type of thing. She had a job for a while stuffing envelopes. This is something I did later, myself, as an adult.

BK: When was this?

NH: Oh, I was doing it as recently as two years ago. While I was on tour, I would get these stuffing-envelope jobs, thinking there was something to do while all these horrible bands were playing. I could take them backstage and earn a little pocket money because, as you know, these shows don't pay well. Plus the money's all garnished anyway by my ex-wife and this asshole management company. So, I thought, this management company has everything tied up as far as my performance income, but they won't know about envelope-stuffing. I'd heard a lot about this and I tried it before and was scammed by a couple of companies that advertise in *The National Enquirer*. I thought I'd give it another go and found a more reputable company in Pueblo, Colorado. I answered their ad. All you had to do was send a measly dollar. So I sent the dollar and got an interesting brochure on how you can make hundreds of dollars a week doing this. The way it worked was you send… I think it was $49 to Pueblo and they send you a book with details on how to do it. So I sent the $49 and they sent me another brochure that said, "Print more copies of the brochure we sent you, put ads in the paper saying 'Information on stuffing envelopes, one dollar,' then you'll see lots of one-dollar bills in the mail, and occasionally you'll get some fool who will send you $49 dollars for more information." So

Buzzine, 2008

Ben Kharakh

https://web.archive.org/web/20100207051802/http://www.buzzine.com/2008/08/neil-hamburger-interview/

that was pretty much the deal there. I tried it but it didn't work for me. It worked for them, obviously.

BK: Have you done these sorts of things in the past?

NH: I was trying to do some knitting, too. There was a company paying for knitting, but I couldn't really handle it. I couldn't knit in a straight line, so that was a waste. I paid $69 for the starter kit. That was, again, from *The National Enquirer*. They were going to pay per piece knitted. It seemed like it would be an easy thing, but I just couldn't get the knack of it.

BK: Going back to your childhood, do you have any siblings?

NH: No, I'm afraid we just don't have anything like that. It's too bad.

BK: Where is it that you spent most of your youth? Where did you grow up?

NH: In the areas of Culver City and Los Angeles, which is where *The Wizard of Oz* was filmed.

BK: Was it as magical a place as Oz?

NH: No. They tore that whole thing down. They should have left it.

BK: That was a significant center in general for motion pictures. Did that play any role in your childhood?

NH: Well, I used to go to MGM Studios, which is Sony Studios now. Things change hands a lot. I would go through the trash can and look for stuff. I found a lot of what you might call demonstration reels. These are videotapes actors would send in showing what they were capable of doing. I'd find a lot of those in the trash and watch those. I think it was a good education in terms of learning how to perform and act.

BK: Do you still have those demonstration reels?

NH: No, I lost a lot of them. I had a storage locker that had a lot of those in there and it got ruined. The ceiling collapsed, it all fell in and ruined everything.

BK: That's unfortunate because they might have been worth a lot of money.

NH: None of these actors went on to do anything. These were people that were not cast. They did not get the role. These people really did not have much of a career. You know, people send their tapes in hoping they'll get cast, but a lot of these envelopes in the trash, I hate to say, weren't even opened.

BK: These actors, as teachers, how would you rate them?

NH: They weren't trying to teach so much as they were trying to show their stuff. I'd say some of these people weren't very good, but it was all I had, so I'd rate it very high. I thought it was interesting. A lot of times the people would do commercials on their tapes. They weren't real commercials. They were phony commercials for non-existent brands of orange juice, that type of thing. They would re-enact a scene from a movie, sometimes *Casablanca*, but it wouldn't be on a set. It would be in their backyard. Some of these tapes were very poorly done. Still, you could see the people were stepping outside their normal day-to-day lives and to strive for something bigger. They had dreams, and if you follow your dreams, you might just achieve the dream you're chasing. Most of us won't; most of us will never achieve that.

BK: And what dream are you chasing?

NH: I would like to have a career that on some level somebody somewhere would say, "That Neil Hamburger — he was a success." And we have not reached that point yet.

BK: Is this a financial sort of success or some other sort of success — like, "That Neil Hamburger, he touched my heart."

NH: I would like to hear that too, and I do hear things like that sometimes, through the course of the evening. But I guess I would like to have enough success that I would be able to cut down my work. We did 399 shows in 2006 and 386 shows last year, so we did cut down by 13 shows. I would like to cut down by, say, 100 shows — have a normal kind of life where you might go on a date with a lady, go out to eat somewhere when you don't have to be at the venue in 15 minutes. Somewhere you don't have to eat fast and get sick. Or have the sort of morning where you can sleep in, because you don't have to get up at 6:30 to drive 822 miles that day, as was the case two days ago for me. That's the sort of life I'd like to lead. The only way to get that is to get better lawyers to sue the ex-wife and the management company, get them off my back so I can keep my income. Or I have to substantially increase the income. The only way we figured out how to do that is to do, sometimes, three or four shows in one night, and that can be grueling. This year, I'm paced to do 515 shows, which is insane. If I could just do a normal amount, like a normal human being would do, say 250 shows a year, I would feel like a success. Because then I would have 115 days off and that would be something else. A lot of people get that. How many weekends in 52 weeks — 104 days off a year plus holidays is what the average person gets. That's all I'm looking for. I just want to do what an average person does.

BK: Some might say that you can never be an average person. You're a performer. You travel across the country, make people laugh, and put smiles on their faces. They would say that Neil Hamburger is an extraordinary person.

NH: I know they would say that. They would also say that about a man with no arms and no legs who is lying in a sewer drowning in raw sewage. They'd say he would have an extraordinary life as well, and it's true. But who wants to trade with him? Some of your biggest celebrities in the world are people who you wouldn't want to be, like the guy who was hit by lightning four times in one year. Who wants to be him?

BK: We don't know his name, but we do know the name Neil Hamburger.

NH: Yes, but more people know the accomplishments of the guy who got hit by lightning. They might not know his name, but they know of that lightning guy. I do have name recognition so I can't complain. I'll tell you — my career, Ben, if I could be honest with you — my career could be in decent shape — I won't say good, but decent — if not for the garnishing of my pay. Because right now I am generating a certain kind of money for others, so there are people out there who are quite happy with what I've managed to accomplish with my hard work. And if this country and western album does well, those people will make even more money, so they're very happy. I will get a small percentage of it because, legally, you cannot garnish 100% of a man's pay. He has to be able to keep something — for food, water and a roof over his head. Thank goodness the laws allow me that.

BK: It seems like everyone wins in this situation except Neil.

NH: That's what I've been trying to say, but nobody's listened so far. I got a lawyer to fix this situation for me, and we had several meetings and things, then, at the end of the day, this lawyer ended up tacking on his percentage to even further cut into my pay. I went to him and said, "Can't we lower the percentage that everyone else is getting?" He said, "We can do that. I'll file some papers." He spent a lot of time filing these papers, the motion was rejected by a court, and I owed him $100,000 or whatever it was for legal fees. He then had to add to that a percentage, so the whole exercise ended up reducing my daily income.

Buzzine, 2008

Ben Kharakh

https://web.archive.org/web/20100207051802/http://www.buzzine.com/2008/08/neil-hamburger-interview/

That's very sad.

BK: It's interesting that you use the phrase "at the end of the day." It's the sort of phrase that people use when they want to talk about what matters at the end. They may say, "At the end of the day, I've got this." So, what would you say? "At the end of the day, I've got…"

NH: Well, at the end of the day I'm on stage, still. My day doesn't end when a normal day ends, so I don't even know whether I should use that phrase. At the end of the day, I've driven 800 miles; at the end of the day, I've had one cold meal usually eaten out of a can with a plastic fork while I'm driving; and at the end of the day, it's midnight and I'm just getting onstage where I'll spend the next hour, before I've got to drive to a rest stop to find a place to set up my cot and get some sleep before the sun comes out so I can start the whole process again. So at the end of the day, there is no end of the day for Neil Hamburger. It's sort of an endless day and an endless year.

Hustler magazine

November 14, 2023

https://hustlermagazine.com/articles/neil-hamburger-unhappy-holidays/

BY KEITH VALCOURT
November 14, 2023

America's Funnyman yuks (and yucks) it up about bitter shopping-mall Santas, the nightmare that is New Year's Eve and his star-studded new album.

Neil Hamburger is the definition of a lovable loser. The comic lounge singer with the tin voice and worst combover in show business has returned from the depths of clinical depression with a new holiday album. It is as sad as it is hilarious. The alter ego of comic Gregg Turkington, Neil Hamburger knows a thing or two about life, loss, love and even more loss.

HUSTLERMagazine.com caught up with Hamburger, aka America's Funnyman, at a sleazy motel just off the 405 freeway to discuss eggnog as a marital aid, alcoholic shopping mall Santas and his star-studded new album, *Neil Hamburger Presents Seasonal Depression Suite*.

Photo by Katie Lewellyn

HUSTLERMagazine.com: Are you okay being interviewed by us?

Neil Hamburger: You know... I am.

Do you have any history with the magazine?

Twenty years ago, I spoke to a young man from HUSTLER. We went to Trader Vic's bar in Beverly Hills. We had a few drinks and talked. They printed a picture of me in HUSTLER. You have all those photos of beautiful women in HUSTLER. Then there was a full page devoted to me and I thought, *The poor readers*. How their blood must have run cold when they were flipping through the pages and instead of the women, they saw me.

Gregg Turkington / Photo courtesy of the artist

Do you remember the first time you ever saw HUSTLER Magazine?

They were always in the trash. I don't think that is because the magazine itself is trash. It could be. I don't know. Back then, what young people did was to go through the trash looking for things like aluminum cans you could turn in and collect a few cents. Or a HUSTLER magazine that you could then sell to other kids on the playground.

Your new album is being released just in time for the holidays. What is the "reason for the season"?

In the world we live in today, the reason for the season seems to be to reflect on another bad year that they have behind them. And to consider what they can do to make next year not so bad. Of course they fail at that too.

Photo by Katie Lewellyn

Eggnog: Yes or no?

I'm going to say no to this. Because of course eggnog doesn't always have eggs in it, and we don't know what nog is. People might drink it hoping for rum. So you might temporarily get away from the holiday gloom. But unfortunately, most eggnog is made with rum extract, which has no alcohol.

Can it be a marital aid?

If you are looking for a way to ruin your marriage. You can serve eggnog every single night with dinner and see what happens. It is the way to sour any relationship.

What one gift should you never give a woman for Christmas?

Probably, any album other than my new album, *Seasonal Depression Suite*. Because we have a fresh take on the holiday season.

Is it still okay to kiss under the mistletoe?

To kiss yourself, perhaps. We have had mistletoe at some of our shows in the holiday season and put it up hoping to inspire holiday romance, but I've never seen anything sexual or romantic happen at my shows. I see people standing or sitting with their arms crossed. They only uncross them just to drink one or up to a dozen drinks.

Hustler magazine
November 14, 2023
https://hustlermagazine.com/articles/neil-hamburger-unhappy-holidays/

Are all shopping mall Santas secret pedophiles?

No. They're not. Most of them have drunk so much bad alcohol that they are completely impotent. A lot of them are cranky and not nice at all. Disagreeable, awful people. I don't blame the Santas themselves. I blame the malls. The malls are paying Santa minimum wage, but collecting 50 to 60 dollars from each kid. The dapper gentleman who would like to play Santa Claus gets very frustrated when paid $7.25 an hour while generating $400 to $500 for the mall in that same hour. You are left with crumb-bums playing Santa, most of which are one step away from kidney dialysis. Many of which pass away before the new year is rung in.

Let's talk about your new album, *Neil Hamburger Presents Seasonal Depression Suite*. How did you get so many great guest stars?

Well we asked. You can always ask. Politely. This advice can be used for getting a date with a lady as well. You ask. They can always say no. But occasionally somebody likes what you have to offer, and they say yes. In our case, these were friends of ours from past endeavors, or people we thought would work well with a particular song. We'd send it to them and say, "We believe you have something to offer the song." And any great artist knows that you serve the song.

You got Neil Finn (Crowded House), Annabella Lwin (Bow Wow Wow), Bonnie "Prince" Billy, Puddles Pity Party and Frank Sinatra's granddaughter. Did they actually know they were doing your album?

They absolutely did. This is not a prank. To have some of our favorite people on the record is a blessing. And it helps the listener; believe it or not, there are some folks out there who might not want to listen to 14 songs with Neil Hamburger lead vocals in a row. This record is more of a musical, and we needed to cast characters.

The album feels like it could be an off-Broadway play. Any plans to expand it to a live show?

The plans would be [to do so], if anyone reaches out and asks. *Jesus Christ Superstar* started out as a record. Not a Broadway show. The Who's *Tommy* started out as a record. I think that's a good trajectory. Whether we are invited to flesh this out? Time will tell.

Photo by Katie Lewellyn

Are there any Neil Hamburger groupies?

I have noticed over the years our audience that used to be 90 percent male has really evened out. We have an even mix of male and female now. As far as groupies? We have enthusiastic, respectful fans. Occasionally, you get someone who wants a selfie and gets a little too touchy-feely. Due to my age, there aren't many women looking for that situation. Although, look at Leonard Cohen. He was in his 70s and there were plenty of opportunities for romance on the road for him. But I'm not Leonard Cohen.

Is there a cure for seasonal depression?

Yes. It's my new album. We are diagnosing the problem, and the cure is the album itself.

Where will you be spending New Year's Eve?

I don't have anything booked yet. New Year's Eve is the worst holiday of the year. It's when all the dummies come out and announce themselves to be idiots. If you want to get hit by a drunk driver or pay $75 for parking or step in somebody's vomited spaghetti dinner while listening to ding dogs hollering out stupid phrases while bottle rockets whiz by your ear, then that is a great night to go out. These days are where people go to dance and drink and dance until they throw up all over their stupid clothing. Happy New Year!

Neil Hamburger's new album, Neil Hamburger Presents Seasonal Depression Suite*, is out November 17th.*

Mountain Xpress

So unfunny you'll forget not to laugh

February 15, 2011

https://mountainx.com/arts/art-news/021611so-unfunny-youll-forget-not-to-laugh/

Thaaat's his life: *Hamburger's show is for fans of anti-comedy — or just spectacles in general.*

Neil Hamburger's self-described never-ending comedy tour is coming back to town. The hack-prince of comedy — who's released nine comedy albums through the Drag City record label over the last 15 years ("I don't listen to these records") and opened for the likes of Faith No More, NOFX, and Bad Religion — will perform his unique brand of persona-driven anti-comedy at The Admiral on Tues, Feb. 22.

"We have a tour that's been going for about 15 years; there's never been a break," Hamburger tells *Xpress*. "Sometimes we break these tours up into segments. Not with any days off — simply by taking a red pen and making a line between one section of the tour and another, just so we feel a little bit better."

If you are a fan of anti-comedy — basically, anything other than a "standard" joke that creates enough cerebral dissonance to leave you laughing, even at the total failure of the joke itself — or just a fan of spectacles in general, Hamburger's act is something to see.

"I want them to know that if they miss this show, they're going to have egg on their face, because this will be one of the most talked-about shows of the week," says Hamburger.

Neil Hamburger is the comic persona of Gregg Turkington, who in the 1980s published the San Francisco-based humor-and-music zine *Breakfast Without Meat* before founding and running Amarillo Records for much of the '90s. In addition to numerous other projects along the way, Turkington was one-half of avant-garde duo Zip Code Rapists and for a time served as tour manager for Mr. Bungle.

Folding extreme hack into genius, Hamburger's act has taken him on a constantly revolving circuit of pizza joints, dive bars, colleges, large theaters, Olympic stadiums and network television appearances.

"I've done it all. I did a show almost five years ago with Tenacious D at Madison Square Garden. The very same month I did a show at a really dirty little pizza parlor in Fresno, Calif., for eight people," says Hamburger, who touts himself variously as "America's Youngest Comedian," "America's Funnyman" and "The World's Funnyman,".

Hamburger regularly opens for musical acts, a notoriously difficult task for any comedian. Last year, his act was well-received when opening several dates for Faith No More, but he was booed off stage during his performance at Reading Festival in the UK.

"I was asked by the stage manager to get off the stage for safety reasons because the audience was reacting more like they should have reacted at the trial of Benito Mussolini, and not at a comedy show," Hamburger says. "Especially when I was making the afternoon so much more memorable by giving their ears a break from the shit music."

More often, his act is alternately met with laughter and groans by the same audience, and Hamburger performs with one foot planted on each side of the line that divides the two reactions.

"The only type of audience I don't like is an empty hall. If there's not even one person there, it can be hard to do a show," Hamburger says.

While projecting a reverence for show business itself (you won't catch him out of tuxedo), Hamburger skewers some of its best-known names, regardless of topicality. Michael Jackson, Madonna, the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Smash Mouth are frequent targets — it's like a Jay Leno monologue, but more honest, vicious, willfully redundant and funny for reasons you may not be able to pin down.

Hamburger takes standard conventions of stand-up comedy to extremes: He can never have too many drinks in his hand on stage, he frequently checks a cheat-sheet stashed in his tux pocket and bits are randomly punctuated with his signature line, "But thaaaaaaat's my life!"

He may follow up a depressing one-liner about his ex-wife's infidelity with a tasteless groaner based on a pun, often "tagging" it simply with his own reaction, a smile-and-laugh that's been tortured into a face-twisting grimace and guttural whine.

The comedian, who says his only aspiration is to "get out of debt," recently released a Magic-8-Ball-esque iPhone app, "Shaky Advice with Neil Hamburger." The best advice he's ever given? "Buy the goddamned app."

Hamburger fondly recalls his December 2009 show at The Admiral.

"I had a great time at The Admiral last time ... it's really a fun room, and the food they had there for us was out of this world, something we were talking about days later, if not weeks," Hamburger says. "I specifically asked the booking agency if they could get us back there ... We look forward to getting back and entertaining the folks."

— Tom Scheve is a writer and performer who lives in the Asheville area.

who: Neil Hamburger
what: Anti-comedy-stravaganza, with opener JP Inc., the professional moniker of multi-media song-parodist JP Hasson, previously known as Pleaseeasaur
where: The Admiral, 400 Haywood Road
when: Tuesday, Feb. 22 (11 p.m. $10. theadmiralnc.com)

San Francisco Examiner

Not concerned with mass appeal, Gregg Turkington thrives as Neil Hamburger

By Will Reisman Oct 13, 2016

https://www.sfexaminer.com/culture/not-concerned-with-mass-appeal-gregg-turkington-thrives-as-neil-hamburger/article_7aaab75a-fbe2-5671-bf75-2e2ba7427118.htm

Neil Hamburger headlines "Comedy Night at The Indy" on Sunday. (Courtesy photo)

By Will Reisman

With his ultra-greasy comb over, garish lounge tuxedo and array of cringe-worthy one-liners, Neil Hamburger is going to offend some people. And that's just fine for Gregg Turkington, the comedian who created the louche, ridiculous persona.

"I'm certainly prepared for the probability that most people will think what I'm doing is crazy," says Turkington, who performs as the character at The Independent this weekend.

Turkington, who lived in San Francisco in the 1980s-90s, was inspired to try out Hamburger after witnessing unseemly oddballs who made up the low-stakes comedy circuit of Reno and Lake Tahoe casinos. He originally imitated the curmudgeonly comics by making crank phone calls, before moving on to comedy albums, and eventually taking the stage as the fully-realized character in a standup routine.

"It started with this preposterous joke that there really should be no audience for, but to me, they were really funny ideas," says Turkington, who starred as a comic playing the Neil Hamburger character in the 2015 movie "Entertainment."

He adds, "Now this character is pretty well known, has been in a feature-film — it's kind of crazy how big it's become."

Those unfamiliar with the character sometimes find him off-putting or bizarre; Turkington says reactions to his shows vary from place to place and on case-by-case basis.

"I think it's more interesting for me when I don't know what to expect," says Turkington. "Sometimes you walk into these small towns and you think people are going to tar and feather you, and they couldn't be nicer. And I've opened shows in San Francisco — my town, basically — and people have been incredibly hostile."

Interestingly, Turkington's other famous comic persona is the opposite of Neil Hamburger.

Working with Tim Heidecker, he created an alternative "Gregg Turkington" character — an obsequious, clueless film critic with a love for VHS movies.

The comics' movie review podcast "On Cinema at the Cinema" is filled with ancillary details and little analysis.

rockass.net

July 20, 2006

https://web.archive.org/web/20080830095447/rockass.net/2006/07/neil-hamburger-interview.html

Neil Hamburger, it would appear, is really suffering for his art. His face bent in an expression of mild annoyance at least but more often he portrays disgust or excruciating pain as he sweats his way through one of his unique comic performances.

I was having a Neil Hamburger day as I struggled to get this interview. The temperature here in Sacramento was in the triple digits, and Iâ€™m not sure any of those digits were a zero either. Then Neil phones in an hour and half late. Itâ€™s hard to sneak my interview in with out the boss noticing if Neil calls when the damn boss is there. But no problem, I rushed over to my lap top, set it recording, conducted the interview, said goodbye and then discovered Iâ€™d recorded exactly five seconds of the interview. I still donâ€™t know what happened. Maybe it was just the Neil Hamburger magic. Iâ€™m nervous as I type this. What misfortune is yet ahead.

Luckily I did without a recorder for years, and so I typed while talking with Neil in case of just such and emergency. Hereâ€™s the interview as reconstructed from my hastily typed notes. Enjoy.

And for more information on Neal's appearance in town, and on the Wasted Weekend click here.

I answer the phone at work with my professional voice, stating the name of the roofing company that employs me, always a great way to start a professional interview.

NH: This is Neil Hamburger.

KLJ: Neil! Great! Let me just get my recorder started here. Itâ€™s gas powered, so Iâ€™ll need a minute.

NH: Oh, so youâ€™ll be having to pump your legs while we talk. Sorry to miss the interview. I hope it's not too late. I hope you didn't already go off and do an interview with Carrot Top or anything.

KLJ: No problem.

NH: We've had some technical difficulties here, some car trouble. If anyone there in Sacramento knows how to work on cars, if they can maybe bring some parts to the show, maybe we can get the engine replaced there.

KLJ: Well youâ€™re here as part of Wasted Weekend so there should be plenty of gear heads around.

NH: Yeah, well that would be great if someone knew how to replace an engine.

KLJ: You know theyâ€™ll be crashing some cars as part of the crasharama?

NH: Yes, I hear it's going to be quite a violent show which I found a bit unnerving actually.

KLJ: So you won't be crashing any cars on Sunday? (Oops, it's actually Saturday)

NH: No. I've crashed enough cars. It gets very expensive. I drive 700 miles a day.

KLJ: You'll be performing here with bands. I notice you tend to perform with rock bands. How does this work out for you?

NH: Well let's face it most of these kids, after all that blaring guitar noise and what not, their hearing is just shot, and the kids that like this kind of music you know a-lot of them have emotional problems, so there's nothing as soothing as the human voice. And comedy is therapeutic. It does them good to laugh.

KLJ: So youâ€™re like a doctor.

NH: Yes. I'm like a physician only without the great pay, and the beautiful wife, and the short hours and the big house and the free pens and paperweights.

KLJ: These free pens worry me. When Iâ€™m at the doctorâ€™s office and heâ€™s prescribing me some anti-depressant, the very medicine named on his pen, I worry that Iâ€™m just taking pills to keep this guy stocked in pens.

NH: Well pens are expensive. You know, one thing the American media overlooks, they report on the oil shortage and what have you, but they don't mention there is an ink shortage going on. Ink has gone up tens of cents.

KLJ: Should I bring my doctor some pens?

NH: I think it could help, you bring maybe twenty pens and a couple of paper weights and maybe you'll get out of there without being prescribed anything other than some fruit cocktail.

KLJ: What kind of prescriptions are you on these days?

NH: I can't afford prescriptions, prescriptions are expensive you know. But the 99 cent store has a lot of good stuff, the aspirin and what not, and these products for females to help with the female problems, they actually work on men too, to help with the headachesâ€¦ and the despairâ€¦ the depressionâ€¦ and the dizzinessâ€¦ and the muscle degeneration. They give you that nauseous feeling.

KLJ: Well I appreciate the health advice, especially useful for those of us with no healthcare. Do you mix the pills? Any combinations you recommend?

NH: I can't really afford to take more than one or two a day, but they're all the same. They all give you that same nauseous feeling, and that nauseous feeling is better than what I feel most of the time when I'm up on that stage.

KLJ: We appreciate your suffering to bring us the laughs. How did you become â€œAmericaâ€™s Funnyman?â€¤ Did a president bestow this title on you?

NH: We saw that America's Funnyman was available so we grabbed it. Some creep, some sick derelict already took neilhamburger.com and he's not even doing anything with it, just waiting until he can contact me and try to shake some money out of me for it. Heâ€™s a lowlife. These lowlifes just grab up these names so they can try to exploit someone later.

KLJ: I know, I wanted to create a site but hotmouths.com is registered, but thereâ€™s not even a site there. Itâ€™s ridiculous. I notice youâ€™re performing outside the US more and more. Are you trying to become the Coalition Forcesâ€™ Funnyman?

NH: (Ignoring my lame joke) I have a new DVD coming out, The World's Funnyman. We taped in Australia and a little bit in Canada, so Iâ€™m taking the comedy to the world, and the name was available. I've been performing in Australia and New Zealand and the U.K. and up in Canadia (sic). And there aren't a lot of funny people in these places you know.

KLJ: So youâ€™re going to Canada where the people are obviously a bit more sophisticated than we are down here and then to New Zealand and Australia where theyâ€™re complete savages. Do you have to change your material for these different audiences?

NH: My biggest problem is the time change. Itâ€™s what, 17 hours difference in Australia and I drive 700 miles a day, so at one in the morning there Iâ€™m waking up in bed, grasping for the steering wheel. But comedy is the same, you know, theyâ€™ll catch the references. They know gang bang. They know vomit.

KLJ: Thank god for the vomiting gangbang. So you donâ€™t say Kangaroo where you might have said Paris Hilton then?

NH: I do a little of that, a regional reference here and there, maybe adding the names of some of their local celebrities.

KLJ: Youâ€™re pretty hard on celebrities.

NH: They ask for it.

KLJ: Have any of them ever responded to your jokes about them?

NH: No, none of them have responded. I was just on tomgreen.com last night with Brook Shields and I got to tell her some of my jokes and she was gracious enough to laugh at them.

KLJ: So the celebrities havenâ€™t been angry, how about regular folks, people with a feminist bent who maybe donâ€™t really get the humor?

NH: Of course there's always the people who'll throw a drink, or throw a shoe, but I don't think it's any kind of activism, it's alcoholism.

KLJ: So no protestors or anything?

NH: No, I haven't had any kind of organized protests, not yet, but if you go and put this on the internet you'll give people ideas. You shouldn't print this or we'll have that happening and I have legal troubles enough.

NH: No, I haven't had any kind of organized protests, not yet, but if you go and put this on the internet you'll give people ideas. You shouldn't print this or we'll have that happening and I have legal troubles enough.

KLJ: I certainly hope this interview doesnâ€™t cause any harm. If there are protestors at any of your shows Iâ€™ll expect to hear from your lawyers.

NH: Well my lawyers may be contacting you anyway.

KLJ: Well then, Iâ€™ll just move away from that question. Can you tell me how you got into comedy?

NH: Well there was a need for comedy in the world. The world was getting worse and so I was called on to give people a much needed laugh.

KLJ: Are there other comedians you look up to?

NH: Oh I don't care for any of these other guys out there. You know, they're taking food out of my belly.
The dead guys are okay, because there's no competition, but these live guys, they're making money, and taking food out of my belly and they're sleeping with women that I might have been able to sleep with. And when they're driving 700 miles they're doing it in a private jet, so you know I don't need to give them any more credit they get too much credit as it is, so I'm not going to help them out here.

KLJ: I bought your album Raw Hamburger. I was lucky enough to find it on vinyl. Are they still pressing your stuff on vinyl or is all CD?

NH: There's always new product, but I'm not real involved in that end of it, you know I handle more of the trinkets. I don't see a-lot of money from the records, there's too many other people involved. I have the key chains and the paper weights and the fruit cocktail.

KLJ: Is the fruit cocktail in heavy syrup?

NH: Yes it was. It was a good product. We've had some problems with that, we've had to take it off the market but I still stand behind it. A lot of these kids buy it just to put it on their mantle and theyâ€™ll never open it.

KLJ<: You seem to be happy that youâ€™ve attracted a young audience.

NH: Yes, the young of today are the old folks of tomorrow, and they'll keep buying, so you want to get them young. That's why we have bibs now.

KLJ: So, records, bibs, fruit cocktail, will we be seeing the Neil Hamburger sitcom or major motion picture soon?

NH: I'd like to do a major motion picture. We did a short film a ten minute film hoping to get some interest and some money in doing that. You know it takes money to do a film. But I'd love to do a sitcom or a film.
There's not a lot of money in this. Sure I'm famous but I don't' see a lot of money and there's too many people taking it, lawyers, my ex-wife. She gets some money because of some comments I made about her on one of my records. In fact I do extra things to make some money, washing cars. If anyone would like to have their car washed, I keep a little soap in my car, if there's a hose and a bucket I do a really good job. And Iâ€™d enjoy that kind of work.

KLJ: Well there should be a lot of dusty cars out at the Crasharama on Sunday if you can stick around. (Again, I got it wrong, Crasharama is on Saturday.)

NH: Well that might work out.

KLJ: Anything else you want to say to Sacramento?

NH: Let's get a good amount of enthusiasm going and make this a great show, let's make it a night to remember.

3.13.2011

INTERVIEW: AMERICA'S FUNNYMAN NEIL HAMBURGER TALKS RAVE MUSIC, CARL'S JR., AND MAGICAL BATTERED MUSHROOMS

https://web.archive.org/web/20110914153508/http://www.spanishforeggs.com/2011/03/interview-americas-funnyman-neil.html

Neil Hamburger says that he's been a comedian for over 92 years. Gregg Turkington is 43. Yet, both men have accomplished a plethora of work done in music, comedy and television. This is a known fact. It's also known that Neil and Gregg are actually the same person. Turkington, who is a musician credited for founding the now defunct Amarillo Records, plays as Neil Hamburger only to the public eye. This persona, comparable to Andy Kaufman's side stint as Tony Clifton, presents to the audience crude and often offensive humor that's incredibly difficult not to laugh at. Many interviewers in the past have found that inquiring about his endeavors as a musician seems to draw out more bitter responses than informational ones. Even the story of his upbringing changes periodically, but one thing that he stresses most is that it was a very disturbed one. Since changing his act from comedian to musician, Neil's roster of projects continues to grow. He's gone from hosting his own series on tomgreen.com (*Poolside Conversations with Neil Hamburger*) to recording his own country western album through Drag City. On Twitter, he recently admitted to wrapping up for a future Fantomas film, but refused any forthcoming information.

Neil's last stop in Louisville with fellow funnymen, Tim Heidecker and Eric Wareheim, brought him as a opening act for the finale show of their Chrimbus Spectacular, referred to that evening as Chrimbus Eve. Neil is no stranger to opening for amazing acts, as he has also been seen commencing shows for names like Guided by Voices, Melvins, Iron and Wine, Pinback, and Louisville's own Bonnie 'Prince' Billy. This spring, Mr. Hamburger returns to Louisville for his own headlining tour at Headliners Music Hall. According to Neil, the Spring Value Tour is meant to pack as much entertainment and laughs into one night as humanly possible. Joining him are comedians Todd Barry and Brendon Walsh. Barry's comedic roots date as far back as Neil's, lending his talents as a voice actor for old-school shows like *Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist* and *Home Movies.* His current endeavors include a recurring role on the Adult Swim series *Delocated* and playing as himself on Louis C.K.'s television show *Louie*. Brendon Walsh has toured extensively for two years with Doug Stanhope and his appearances have varied from *Premium Blend* to *The Bob & Tom Show.*

I chatted with Neil in the afternoon while he was three hours behind me in California. During our conversation, I found him to be a very sincere man who has a serious commitment to his profession in making people laugh. Here's what Mr. Hamburger had to say about everything else...

Do you feel like there's any competition between you and other comedians?

Well there's always competition because the problem is, most of the folks these days, most of the night clubs and things, you know they have this techno music- have you heard this?

Yeah, I don't really like it.

It's horrible. No one likes it, yet the clubs are packed. Now, they've taken bulldozers to some of the great comedy clubs, pizza parlors, and rock n' roll night clubs, to put in these new techno buildings. They're very ice cold inside and they have vending machines at the bars that dispense drugs to these drug filled assholes to listen to that monotonous music. As a result of this, there's only so much comedy work to go around. But you've got 500,000 comedians and only 1,000 shows a night to pay, you can see where this competition creates, unfortunately, a very unpleasant environment when you when spend time with these other comedians, because everyone's scrambling to get the same ten cents. Know what I'm saying?

Now in the case of the Spring Value Tour, we, some of the quality comedians, some of the real deal comedians, decided to join forces and bring a bill that packs so much entertainment into one evening, it's a surprise that it's not a $500,000 ticket. We're only trying to give the people their money's worth just by packing an insane number of laughs into a small amount of time; that's what we're trying to do. Whether or not it works, well, we just don't know.

Yeah, but everybody gets their time, too.

Which is very important.

Twitter question from @KentuckyProphet: How do you determine your opening acts?

Well you know, that's an interesting interview question, it seems a little bit like trick, you know? A lot of interview questions would be things like "Neil! What's your favorite color?" "Neil! What's your favorite Elvis Costello movie?" "Neil! What's your favorite Nancy Sinatra song?" Those are the sorts of questions you usually get. This question is more along the lines of probably your next question. I bet your next question is from the Super 8 Motel saying, "Neil, have you already reserved a room? We got great deals going right now." Now I don't want to speak badly of the Kentucky Prophet, I've heard that his music is in fact quite good. The sad truth is that we put together a full bill, a full night of entertainment, so there's really no more room for other acts. When we go out there, it's myself and Todd Barry, who everyone knows from movies, from all the late-night talk shows, from his really award winning career. Brendon Walsh who's been seen on all the late-night shows, you know, has also had a wonderful career; we already have three folks on one bill. There really isn't room for anything more, so I must respectfully tip my hat to the Kentucky Prophet, but really this bill full. And if anything, it's over-filled.

I heard in another interview that you thought K-Fed's album was really killer, so I was wondering if there were any other records you would consider the best of all time?

Boy, that's a good question. That's not one you get very often, and normally it's these motels trying to get you get to book them. Well there's an album by Frank Sinatra Jr., the son of Frank Sinatra, and the album is called *Spice*. And I think you'll find that it's one of the top albums that are out there for listening. We really have enjoyed it through the years and I would give my vote to that. I try not to listen to a lot of music because it distracts the mind from you really need to be doing, which is paying attention to the road.

Is that the only album?

Well, there are a few albums we have listened to. Do you know who I really like? Bow Wow Wow, did you ever hear these guys?

Yes.

That's really a good sound. I mean it really was a happy sound, Bow Wow Wow. They had songs that were very popular in the 1980's when I was getting my start. And they're one of those [bands] I think really hold up today under the light, so I really recommend them. I'm also a really big fan of any of the old orchestras, you know the Tommy Dorsey orchestra, the Jimmy Dorsey orchestra, the Glenn Miller orchestra, any of the old singers like Rudy Valley, these guys who could really put a show out there for ya. Nowadays, I don't know if you've noticed this, but probably as a journalist you would, as journalists have an attention for detail but of lot of the performers are slobs, you know? You don't come out on the stage wearing a dirty t-shirt that's incrusted with all the garbage that's soaking out of their armpits. And sometimes if you go to...do you have Carl's Jr. in Kentucky?

3.13.2011

INTERVIEW: AMERICA'S FUNNYMAN NEIL HAMBURGER TALKS RAVE MUSIC, CARL'S JR., AND MAGICAL BATTERED MUSHROOMS

https://web.archive.org/web/20110914153508/http://www.spanishforeggs.com/2011/03/interview-americas-funnyman-neil.html

Carl's Jr.?

Yeah, you have Hardy's. Alright, Hardy's, on the west coast is called Carl's Jr. and the further east you go they call it Hardy's. If you eat the food from Hardy's, you will sweat out a little stone. They're the size of grains of salt, they're black, and they'll come out of your pores. It comes from the garbage that they're serving at that Hardy's. Some of the oils are straight out of hell itself. So, these bands they go to Hardy's and they'll have some kind of sandwich and the next day if you raise their arms and I don't recommend you do, because most of these musicians smell horrible. But if you raise their arms you'll see the oily black clumps that look like tar coming out of the pores under their arms. Now, it's disgusting. What they need to do is wash this off, but instead, these bands will get on stage wearing a dirty t-shirt and if you look under the shirt, it's filthy dirty from these globs of the Hardy's tar. They'll have dirt under their nails, halitosis, and a lot of them have hepatitis, or BD, and they get up on stage wearing sweat pants and that's not really the kind of music anyone wants to look at or hear. Compared to these great orchestras, to answer your question, if you were to ever go see the Tommy Dorsey orchestra, you would see guys wearing suits and ties, you know what I'm saying? Impeccably groomed and always smelling fresh and not eating at Hardy's… and that's really what makes the difference.

Do you have any distinct memories of your visits to Louisville?

Yeah I sure do. We had some real good mushrooms. They cooked these mushrooms up, oh boy...I don't know the place, it was downtown, but I'll never forget these mushrooms. They battered them in something, or maybe it was the Colonel's 11 herbs and spices. It certainly was better than that. This place was just a little place downtown with these magical battered mushrooms. Do you know what place I'm talking about? I'd love to get some of those again.

I'm not sure, but I'm sure someone who reads this interview would.

[Note: If anyone knows the name of the restaurant where Neil got these mushrooms, please let me know! I would like to relay the answer to him and perhaps try them myself.]

Well they'll have to get in touch. I also really had a wonderful show there some years ago with a wonderful, wonderful two-piece act called Elvis and Meatloaf dot com. They're two brothers. One of them was truly an amazing Meatloaf impersonator. He has the sound, he has the look, I mean he was Meatloaf. He would do a couple songs and then leave the stage, and then his brother would come out and did a fairly incredible Elvis impersonation. And then Elvis would leave and Meatloaf would come back out. It went like this all night long; it was really something. I was honored to share a building with this group. And I understand that they play some of the casinos in the area...I don't know if the casinos are there in town or if they're across the river or what but these guys were real great and it was real fun seeing them. Then afterwards as I said, eating these battered mushrooms...I think it was a cornmeal that was on the outside of the mushrooms. It was quite good.

Sounds really good.

Also, I went on tour there and went to the Old Spaghetti Factory; I remember that place. Now, I'm sure that's not the finest place you've got in town there in Kentucky. I went in there and walked around and it seemed like there was a lot of bankers and financial guys in the area and I don't tend to get along with those people.

Yeah, it's definitely not the fanciest place here.

We also went to the Kentucky Fried Chicken headquarters and the beautiful mansion they have there. We tried to see Colonel Sanders's grave and they wouldn't let us because this was right after 9/11. We were told they were not letting visitors see the grave because of 9/11…I don't see the connection, personally. They also had Colonel Sanders's desk. You could sit behind it and have a photo taken. Another time we stopped in Corbin, Kentucky at the original location of Kentucky Fried Chicken at Sanders Court, and they were selling old photograph records of Colonel Sanders's mandolin band. He had a whole band of mandolin players that played spiritual songs, and they were selling these albums right there at KFC over the counter for a mere five dollars. So you will want to stop in there if you get the chance, if you like mandolin music. I mean, who doesn't like mandolin music? These are records from 1959 and they're selling them there in Corbin, so do stop by.

Also, I was [in Louisville] with Tim and Eric and John C. Reilly. We travelled in a bus and had some wonderful fans that travelled all the way to Columbus, and they were there again in Kentucky. They were just the sweetest kids and we loved them. They were really nice people; nice folks.

What crimes have you committed spiritually?

Well, I don't know if this is spiritual or not, but when I'm in the hallways out of my hotel room, and [on those carts] the maids sometimes have a little box of pens, a little box of shampoo bottles, and usually I try to scoop my hand in there and try to take as much of that as I can. I wouldn't say it's a spiritual crime, if anything it's a very un-spiritual crime, but it is a crime. It is something I feel bad about.

Is that the only crime?

There are a couple shows where I didn't give it my all, and for that I'm very sorry. I'm not going to name the cities because I don't want to disgrace myself, and anyone who paid money to see the show. Generally I will give it my all every single night and that's what you have to do, but when you do an average of 400 shows a year, which I've been known to do. You get the occasional night where you feel sick or maybe you ate some bad canned food and you don't give it your all. That really is a crime against God, who created the some of the canned food that got me sick. But you really need to give it your all, or it's a crime against the readers, you know?

How do you feel about kids these days?

Well you know I think a lot of them are souped up on God-knows-what. They need to clean up their act and quit listening to that techno music that I'm talking about, which is real garbage. They play a lot of televised shows with remotes and everything, but I think what the kids need to do is come see the show. Can they even get into the venue? I have no idea, but I do think kids need to laugh more these days. There's a lot of stress going around and this is a difficult time to be a young person today. So I do salute them. Any time there are kids at the show, we always try to shake their hand, give them discounts on our merchandise. Neil Hamburger dolls… a lot of the kids really like dolls, you know, it's sort of a security blanket sort of thing. I do wish they would educate themselves some more about good comedy because some of this junk you see in the theaters... I don't know if you've seen *Marmaduke*, but that was garbage. It was rubbish. I think you'd be much better off watching *Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy* or *Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man*. I mean, those are quality movies. But this Marmaduke dog, is clearly on drugs or something. And to promote drug use amongst animals is the lowest of the low.

Favorite pizza.

Well you know, I prefer something that doesn't have a lot of oil on it. Have you seen the Nile in Egypt? If you can imagine transplanting the river Nile on top of pizza, except imagine that the river Nile was all oil. That's what all the Pizza Hut pizzas look like. It's really quite disgusting. I think that's pretty shameful; I would stay away from that.

Twitter question from @Thaxter: Why is the guy who plays Neil Hamburger on TV not the guy I hear on my vinyl records?

Well, it is the same guy. The problem is, Thaxter, smart aleck, is that if you've been buying the records, look at the year on the record. I've been doing this for so many years, and honestly my act has changed over the years. I've gotten older and as you get older your voice deepens, sort of mellows with age and that sort of thing. I could say to Thaxter: why is a 3-year-old baby that I have photographs of with a diaper full of feces not the same strapping young man that's on Twitter asking questions? And the reason is, Thaxter, is that you've grown and changed with time. Now, I don't know what records I've mine he has. But I can guarantee it's the same person, but I have aged considerably. Now, Thaxter, you've aged, we're all heading towards the grave. I haven't had a day off in 12 years; if you work this hard doing this many shows it ages you prematurely. Every one year that you age, Thaxter, I age two, because unfortunately show business is the hardest type of business to be involved in. So if you have a record, say he has my first album *America's Funnyman*, from 1996, well that's 15 years ago. In show business years, that's 30 years ago. If you listen to Frank Sinatra's vocals from 1948 and listen to his vocals from 1978, you could easily say that this is not the same man because Frank Sinatra used to have the voice of an angel. He used to have a very sweet, tenor voice and with time it became raspy, old and crotchety. Now I happen to like that very much and any fan would, but I don't believe conspiracy theorists like this Thaxter guy accusing them of having switched out one Frank Sinatra for the other. Frank Sinatra from 1948 was as thin as a rail, the man probably weighed 110 pounds soaking wet. And Frank Sinatra from19 78 was quite a bit more hefty. I don't understand how Thaxter got through life not noticing this. Did he not notice at one point that he started growing hair above his lip? I mean come on, Thaxter.

You're 43, aren't you?

Well, there's a lot of misconception about that. There's a lot of information out there on the internet and there's no way to control it.

So how old are you?

Well we can't answer that because we don't want to feed the misconception on the internet. We have a policy of not answering questions like that, because if you do, it causes

3.13.2011

INTERVIEW: AMERICA'S FUNNYMAN NEIL HAMBURGER TALKS RAVE MUSIC, CARL'S JR., AND MAGICAL BATTERED MUSHROOMS

https://web.archive.org/web/20110914153508/http://www.spanishforeggs.com/2011/03/interview-americas-funnyman-neil.html

more inaccuracy.

I guess it's better to remain inaccurate..?

Well it's better if people try to get their facts straight, but we can't contribute to the mass by giving answers like that.

And you've been doing comedy for 92 years?

Well, I wouldn't say that many, but that's closer to the truth than some of the other things I've read. Definitely there has been a lot of comedy, and it has gone on far too long, but a lot of the audiences have moved onto other things. A lot of folks that used to come to the shows are in nursing homes, or some of them are working as strippers. I mean, anything can happen; the next great thing might change. I'll tell you, my interest in putting on the best show that I can, that never changes.

Do you have a message for Louisville?

Yes. We are bringing what I think will be the show of the year, 2011. I think it will be the most talked about show of 2011 and I dare say it will be the best value show of 2011. What else is coming to town this year? Do you know of anything that could rival this? I don't think Limp Bizkit could compete. I don't think Eric Clapton could.

Robert Plant, Wanda Jackson…

Well, those are great legends in their own right. How much are the tickets, though? The thing is, we have a good price. If you were to see these acts separately, you would be paying three times as much at least. Todd Barry, you might have seen in the Oscar-award winning motion picture, The Wrestler, and on every late-night comedy show there ever was. If you were to ever see him in concert, you would have to go to the emergency room from an aching gut, a bleeding throat, and tears at the side of your mouth because you smiling and laughing so damn hard. Put him on a bill with somebody like myself and Brendon Walsh, it really speaks very well of what kind of year 2011 will be, because you will be kicking it off with laughter, joy, happiness, a little bit of disdain, disappointment, maybe some anger. But mainly, the other things I was mentioning. It's really going to be a fantastic show and I really hope the town comes out and gets behind it. The last time I was up there it was snowing. I don't know if we'll have snow; I could be wrong.

It's possible.

Well, wear something like boots to protect your feet in the snow when it's snowing, and look fashionable if it's not. That would be my recommendation.

Neil Hamburger will be performing with Todd Barry and Brendon Walsh at Headliners, 1386 Lexington Rd., April 14th. Tickets are $17 advance and $20 day of show available through Headliners, Ear-X-Tacy, and E-tix. Ages 18 & up. Doors open at 8 PM. Show at 9 PM.

Photo: Flickr/ Rick Hall

Neil Hamburger 3

Submitted by ben on Fri, 2007-05-11 12:21.

By Ben Kharakh

An edited version of this interview first appeared online on Austin's That Other Paper on April 22nd, 2007

Let's say money were no object for you. What would you do then, with your life?
I'd probably get some sort of nicer mattress, and just, you know, get involved in a very deep slumber. Try to sleep off some of the disappointment and pain that I've had over the last few years of doing these shows. And I think that's what it'd take, maybe get a nice sweater, something warm, you know. And that's something clean. And really take the time to just unwind and enjoy life. You know, maybe catch up on reading. That type of thing.

With the grueling schedule that you keep, how much time do you actually get to yourself to say, maybe sit down, have a nap, or glass of water?
Are you counting sitting down, having a nap and a glass of water while I'm driving, or do you mean when I'm not driving?

While not driving.
Because I do sit quite a bit, in the car. You know, you can usually have a glass of water at these venues. They often – not always, but often – they give you a glass of water. And a chair. Sometimes you sit on a barstool, that type of thing. So I would say from the time I get to a venue until the time I leave the venue, until the time I go onstage, you're looking at about two hours a day of that. But usually there's some horrible asshole rock and roll band playing some screaming music, you know, to distract from your thoughts, so you can't relax before the show.

How do you think you'd fair in some sort of prison-type scenario?
Well I think I'm living in a prison-type scenario, you know? Honestly, you know. I sleep on a cot. I do not really have any real privacy. I do not have any sort of income. These prisoners make more money stuffing envelopes than I make telling these jokes, you know what I'm saying. And it's only getting worse. I have not, you know, gotten any of the rape that you get in the prisons, that is something I have managed to avoid. And hopefully in 2007 we can continue to avoid that.

Have there been any times in your life when rape seemed like a horrible possibility?
Well, you know, sometimes there's people throwing apples and things at you onstage and you think that's just around the corner.

When people throw apples at you, do you usually, say, collect those and eat them later, or how do you deal with that?
Well, they bruise, but you can cut those bruises off. And yes, you would eat that apple, because a lot of times that's better than the slop that they're serving you at the show, in the rare case where your contract requires that you're given dinner.

If someone throws an apple at you, it makes me think of the warning people give little kids around Halloween that you shouldn't eat an apple if someone gives it to you, because there could be a razorblade inside.
Well there could be a razorblade inside, but that might be a blessing as well. I don't have enough food thrown at me or handed to me that I can afford to be picky with it, so I'm just going to eat it. If there's a razorblade, so be it. Maybe I'll get on the news that day, and that'd probably be some good publicity, right there.

So if you were walking down the street, and you found a Snickers bar, would you eat that?
Of course I would.

Under what circumstances, then, would you not eat a piece of food that you found?
Well, you know if it was completely spoiled. Now, we did a show on December 1st at Madison Square Garden. Have you heard of this place?

Yes.
This was huge. Biggest show I've done in quite some time. And you know, this one here, I was only the

opening act, but nonetheless, I was given my own dressing room. Now, I wish I could've stayed there and slept in that dressing room, because there was a couch in that dressing room, which is a very rare occurrence for me, you know what I'm saying? But unfortunately when the show was over, I was escorted out of the building and thrown out of there on my ear, and I could not sleep on this couch. But anyway, to get back to your question, Madison Square Garden, which has had the Pope and Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Barbara Streisand, Michael Jackson – they've all performed here. It's a great, great venue. Andrew Dice Clay did a movie there. But I expected that the food that was served to me backstage would be the finest that there is, you know. Because it's certainly the most prestigious venue that I've ever performed at. Well, let me tell you what I had: they gave me a package of diabetic cookies – now I did not have diabetes, I do no know why this was given to me – four packages of miniature, vending machine-size Cheez-Its – which I did not request, and do not eat – and a gigantic bowl – now this bowl was probably two pounds – the contents of this bowl was avocado dip, guacamole. Now that sounds good, doesn't it? And we had a few potato chips there, and I scooped a bit of this guacamole up, and took a bite – this was going to be my dinner before hitting the stage at this wonderful venue – and I got the taste in my mouth of spoiled fish. Of fish, of canned tuna fish, that had been mixed with mayonnaise and then left out in the sun for a week. Nowhere in my mouth did I taste avocado, or anything that did not taste exactly like fish. Now I spit this out and I looked at the bowl, and it was green as green can be. As green as green beans, or as Mr. Green Jeans. But yet the taste was nothing at all like avocado – it was the taste of fish, of spoiled fish. How could they do that? Because you would think that a spoiled avocado dip would be a dark brown, or a grey. But this was beautiful, beautiful – as green as your eyes. And yet it had the flavor of fish. And this is what they served the acts of this prestigious venue. Now I later took this to Tenacious D and to some of the other folks on the tour and said, "Have a whiff of this. What does this smell like to you?" And people were literally having to suppress their gag reflex. This is what I was given to eat, along with some diabetic cookies. It just goes to show you, you can be at the top of your game, and still be dealing with the same frustrations that plague you when you're at the bottom of your game.

And did they send this to you by accident or on purpose?
Well, it was in – they had an ice chest, in which was some tonic water, some water, some Pepsi Cola, some Absolut brand vodka – which is a quality vodka, not the usual that I get, and this bowl of avocado dip. So it was on ice. I do not know if it was intentional, that they were trying to poison me, or what was going on. But I did think that I should bring it to your attention, since you are a journalist.

I think once people read this article, then artists of all sorts, musicians and comedians will know to be more careful once they're at Madison Square Garden.
Well I'll tell you one thing, they had The Who in there just a few days earlier. Am I to believe Roger Daltry was supposed to eat this stuff? I mean, this would make you gag – the few folks that tried it, gagged. No one could keep it in their mouth. This is the type of thing that if you eat it, you're rinsing your mouth out with mustard, if you could find it. Anything to get this flavor out, you know? I don't think Barbara Streisand would put up with this. And yet, it was wrapped in plastic wrap, and it appeared to be a completely legitimate bowl of food. So, I really wonder what was going on there, and I'm a little disappointed I have to say. You get fourteen, fifteen-thousand people there, even if they were to take, say, a third of a cent, add that to the price of each ticket – one-third of one cent – you would probably be able to get me the best guacamole on all of the East Coast with that kind of money.

Performing for that many people, what was that experience like?
Well, you know, they're all, they've got problems, these people there. They were chanting at me, you know. Chanting, "Asshole! Asshole!" You know. And that can throw you off. That's no way to have things go, you know what I'm saying?

I asked someone that went to the show, and they said it was mostly an audience of between 10 and 12 year olds. Was that the case?
Oh, I don't know. I didn't check their genitals, I don't know how old they were.

Have you performed in front of an audience of as young as 10, 12, or maybe even younger? Like at a children's party?
Yeah, I've done some children's parties, sure I have.

What are those experiences usually like?
Well, you've got to change your jokes, you can't be telling all the garbage humor that I normally tell, because the audiences these days are so sick, you know. So many problems. But the kids, they're not as sick. They're still sick, but they're not as sick. So, you know, you tone down the language. I mean, they still want to hear the obscene jokes, but you have to use the childish words for some of these phrases. You can't say "shit," you've got to say "doo-doo". But it's the same joke. You can't say "gang-bang," you've got to say "PTA meeting". You know, you've got to change it around a bit.

When you perform at a children's party, do you also have to dress differently? Do they request something like that of you?
No, you know, I couldn't dress differently, because I'm a professional, and I have, basically a uniform. Which is a uniform of a quality entertainer. So I don't know why you'd want me to come out in a dirty T-shirt with mustard stains like those jerks in Yo La Tengo would do. You know, that's not what I'm gonna do. It's always going to be about putting on a quality show with me.

I thought that perhaps they might ask that you be dressed as a cartoon character or something?
Well, you know, I could do that, if there were some sort of payment involved that was better than what I'm getting to do the shows I'm doing now. I'll tell ya, I'd gladly put on a mouse-head or moose-head or whatever it is.

Do you consider your jokes your children?
No, I have a child, you know. And that's a sad and strange sort of situation. But in some ways, I'm estranged from a lot my jokes, too. You know, they're just spit out, by remote control at this point.

Would you say that, like children, jokes need to be nurtured?
No, definitely not, you don't need to nurture these things. These things, you know, they're quite mature. If anything, some of them need a good spanking, if you know what I mean.

Are you talking about jokes or children?
Jokes.

Oh.
But you know, for the children, you sometimes have to do that to. Like I said, I'm not in contact with my child

at this point, but hopefully we can resolve that in the future.

How do you feel about spanking one's child as a form of punishment? What do you think of something like that?
Well, I'll tell you what, if these people at Madison Square Garden came out to see the way their children were behaving, I hope they would've smacked them all. Because you don't go to a venue like that, which is so historic, where the Pope has performed, and you don't go into that and call strangers, such as myself, "asshole." You know, that's not…that's not a good way to be, kids. So I would hope that these kids got the holy hell beaten out of them, quite honestly.

They say that children are the future. How do you feel, then about the future of the world, based on this experience?
Who says that? I don't think they say that.

I think I've heard it on television a couple of times.
Well, I think the children are not the future. The future is in folks like me, who are keeping people entertained. That is the future.

What do you think must be done then, with children?
Well I think they should spend some money on my albums, and come to the show. That's an investment in all of our futures.

Have you taken any measures to make your show more accessible to children?
Like wheelchair ramps?

I don't know, it just seems like if you get them young, they are more likely to spend more of their money on Neil Hamburger.
Well yeah, that's definitely a strategy we're hoping to take. Do you know anything about how to get these kids involved?

I know cigarette companies use a mascot. Like they had that Joe Camel to get people excited.
I think that Joe Campbell, I don't think that Campbell cigarettes is allowed to use Joe Campbell anymore. I think they lost the legal battle on that one. So I don't think I can use Joe Campbell.

Well there's a lot of cigarettes in different movies, and that makes it look like smoking is cool.
So maybe I should start smoking. I don't know if that would help sell those cigarettes, but if that's what it takes to move those cigarettes, I guess I can do it, if that's what you're asking.

You appeared in the Tenacious D movie, perhaps you could take that route as well.
Smoking in the movie? I think the movie has already come and gone, it's a little too late to smoke in that scene.

Have you found that, having appeared in this movie that your star has risen a little bit?
Well, it's probably too early to tell. You know, I would like to think so. I just shot a TV show, just yesterday. There's a new show – have you heard of these guys Tim and Eric?

Yes.
These guys, they've got a new TV show, because they know what they're doing. So, they've got a new television program and they had me come in, and they shot an episode yesterday, in which I'm playing a taxi driver. With a taxicab called "Hamburger Taxi". Anyway, we shot this thing yesterday. So you know, you get your occasional moments of light amongst all the darkness, you know what I'm saying? Such as a movie or TV appearance, or some of this avocado dip that isn't spoiled, which we had a couple nights later, in Atlanta. We had an avocado dip which really, was really not bad at all.

You also have recorded something for the Stars network, correct?

That's right! Are you some sort of stalker person? How do you know this…what is this?

I had researched you beforehand to see what you were up to.
So you're just a good journalist, then. Yes, we did something for a program called, Special Sauce. I believe it airs in April. Now, this was a situation where they had an audience of pig-people in Las Vegas, who were asked to come out and laugh at some of the new comedians, some of the up-and-comers. And these pig-people really tried their best to make me look bad by having the sour, you know, the lemon faces. I don't know if they can fix that in editing or not, but it was not a pleasant five minutes for me, believe me. Unlike working with the Tim and Eric folk, who are a pleasure be around, you know?

And what do you mean by "pig-people"?
Well, you watch the show when it comes out and take a

look at these people, and you tell me they're not pig-people.

Do you find yourself often performing in front of garish, unattractive crowds?
It has happened, you know? Now, the funny thing is, we did a show in Las Vegas about a week after the taping of the Special Sauce television extravaganza. About a week later, we did a show there at the House of Blues, which is a very prestigious nightclub, I'm sure you've heard of it. And this was a show Tenacious D, and I have to say that the audience at that show was quite nice. The pig-people had left Las Vegas. It really was a real feather in the cap, that show, so, you just don't know what you're going to get. Generally, you do see some faces out there that you don't want to look at.

How do you usually deal with performing in front of an entire crowd of pig-people?
Well, I just do the show that I am trained to do. I just keep on going and do the best that I can, you know? You don't want to ever let down your guard, you don't want to let these people shake you a little bit. You know, we had some people in the United Kingdom a couple weeks ago, who insisted on throwing these two-pence coins, you know? Which is not a very nice thing to do. But, you can't let it affect you, you've got to do your job. You've got to continue on, anyway, regardless, and tell the jokes you were paid to tell. So, no, to answer your question, I will not bow to these pig-people.

How much of the population of America, would you say, is so unattractive that you could call them pig-people?
It's not strictly a physical thing. It has a lot to do with their personality, their way of life, these pig-people. And their response to my show. You know, what they've had for dinner. If they went to Sbarro, have you ever been to that place?

No.
Do you know the place I'm talking about?

The name sounds familiar. Is that the place where for dessert, they cover something in a thing leaf of gold?
I don't think so. This is the place where they have a gigantic vat, as big as a swimming pool, full of burnt, old tomato sauce. And then they have another giant vat, filled with over-cooked, limp pasta noodles, which are just disintegrating, turning to dust because they're so old. And then they mix a little grease in with that. And

then they just combine these two ingredients and serve it up. Usually on the New Jersey Turnpike, at the stops, you'll see this Sbarro. Or, other times, you'll be at shopping malls, airports. It's a very popular chain.

Oh!
That's where the pig-people eat.

I've heard of it. It's the place at food-courts that sells Italian food.
Yeah, yeah. S-B-A-R-R-O. That is some bad, bad food. That's what the pig-people eat.

Do you think that by bad-mouthing the Sbarro people, you could be costing yourself an endorsement deal?
No, because they don't have television advertisements for celebrities, so I'm not worried about it. And because I don't think I could eat their food on camera and smile afterwards, like I'd be needing to do. This food, you know, it'll make you sick. Have you had this food?

No.
Don't. That's my advice.

Are there any products that you'd be willing to endorse that perhaps you wouldn't approve of using?
Yeah, there's quite a few actually. Pretty much anything. Except Sbarro.

To bring this around to how we were discussing cigarettes, you'd be willing to be a spokesperson for say, Marlboro or Newport?
Well, as long as I didn't have to say that I liked their product. You know, as long as I could do the ad and mention that I didn't like the product in the ad, I'd be very happy to advertise, and help promote their product.

What are some companies that you've been associated with in the past, in terms of endorsements, or spoke speaking?
I did a public service announcement for the, what is it? The National Association for the Prevention of Falling Merchandise. Because you have these giant warehouse stores, with the products stacked up to the ceiling, big stuff falls down and kills people, all the time. You know, there's support groups for victims of falling merchandise, the families of the victims of falling merchandise, that sort of thing, and a couple years ago, when I was in Chicago I was asked to do some public service announcements, and act in the capacity as a spokesperson for this, and so I did. Free of charge. Just to help the cause.

Are there any other causes that you strongly believe in?
Well, you know I believe that there should be laws in place, minimum-wage laws for comedians, because these fry-cooks get their $5.15 an hour. And these guys that clean the toilets in the Chevron stations, they're getting paid, even the toilets aren't often clean, you know? Yet the comedians, we can do a show, and there's no minimum-wage. We'll get nothing. And I think that should be changed.

Have you ever thought of running for some sort of political office?
I would like to get some sort of job as some sort of public servant, because that pays very well, but I don't think it's in the cards, honestly.

What do you think of the current political situation in America? What do you think of the President?
Well, you know, I think we've had some better Presidents than this one, sorry to report. He may not be number one on the list, you know what I'm saying? But, you know, he is the President, so you do have to pay attention to what he says, in order to develop some jokes, at his expense. Which would then turn into comedic gold. And that's been going on well before this President, or the one before that, or even another dozen before those. Because these guys are the butt of all of our jokes, so you have to thank them for that.

As a comedian, do you think you might've had an advantage if you had been performing during the term of a more hilarious President of some sort?
Yeah, you know the Millard Fillmore comedians – the jokes wrote themselves, shall we say. So it is tough. But you know, we do the best we can. You can still recycle some of the other jokes, you know. You get the George Bush jokes, from the first George Bush, and you twist them around a little bit and apply them to this guy, or you take an old Calvin Coolidge joke and you want to spice it up a little bit with a little more sex, and make it into a George W. Bush joke – you know, it can be done. You just have to have the years of experience that I do in this business to get away with something like that, you know? I would not suggest to an amateur that you try to turn a Warren Harding joke into a Bill Clinton joke, because you might make an asshole of yourself, you know what I'm saying?

How about other world leaders, of past and present?
It's all fair game, you know? We can tell a joke about that guy – the Pringles guy on the can, you know, with the mustache. We can tell a joke about anybody. Because you know, they have not restricted the freedom of speech for comedians at this point, which is one of the great things we have going for us. Now what we don't have going for us, as comedians, is any sort of pay-scale that is reasonable, or even humane. Any sort of working conditions – rules that would make sure the working conditions are reasonable, so that you could maybe have a screen in front of you onstage, so when people throw apples, the screen intercepts these apples, and they don't hit you. Maybe when you are given water by someone backstage, that you'll know it doesn't have trichinosis in it, that you'll know it's pure, clean water. Some of these venues, you know, they'll scrape it right out from the inside of a toilet bowl and give it to you, you know. They don't care, they have nothing to gain by being respectful to their performers – they're one step down from the guy who mops the floor at the end of the night, you know what I'm saying?

Now, I'm just curious to know, what do you think of some of the hot topic issues that people often discuss? What's your opinion on gay marriage?
Gay marriage?

Yes.
I think that would be just a wonderful marriage to attend, if they have some sort of free food there. Because it's very hard for me to get paid enough to eat some of these hors d'oeuvres that they have at a gay marriage. And I really do like these little crackers from England – water, water crackers are they called? I tried the things you might find at a gay marriage, some of the brie cheeses that are very expensive, and you fill your pockets at these so-called gay marriages, and then you sell them to people at the show, before you go on, at your merch stand, you know, half-price on these cheeses. And I would definitely like to get some fruit, because that's good for you. You get that at the gay marriages – sliced pears, peaches, cantaloupes, watermelon – all these exotic fruits that you just can't afford normally. Mandarin orange. All that stuff. It's fantastic.

What was that last one?
Mandarin orange.

The one after that.
There was no fruit after that.

Oh, sorry.
But you know, there could be. You might have a cumquat. Or a pomegranate. Free of charge.

What's your opinion on abortion?
Well I don't think that abortion clinics really do have much in the way of free food, so I can't say that I'd be too excited to attend an abortion. I'd much rather go to a gay wedding.

How about the war on Iraq?
Now I would like to avoid attending that altogether. Although, you know, I'm always happy to perform for our troops, if they want to hear what I have to say, but generally they don't.

Have you had any sort of military experience?
Well I've performed before a few military folks, but I have not served in the line of duty, if that's what you're saying. Although I'll tell you what, performing before those British the other day, it felt like some sort of war was going on.

In what respect?
Well, you know, they're screaming some of the anti-American sentiments toward me, and throwing some of the British coins at me, you know. And I'll tell you what, our President, he really needs to get something going in terms of putting more weight on our coins. Because those British two-cent coins – those hurt. You get hit with one of those things, that'll take your eye out. As opposed to, what do we have? We don't even have two-cent coin, and a one-cent coin isn't going to hurt anybody, you know? You need to get these things together if you're going to win these wars.

Do you think that, if you had to, that you'd be capable of serving in the war? Or, do you think, if pressed to it, that you'd be able to kill another person?
I think that I might not be the best choice, but on the other hand, the pay might be a little bit better, you know?

But do you think you could kill someone?
I think I could do it. I think I could gladly do it with some of these people. Carrot Top, that type of thing.

Who else, would you then, given the opportunity, who would you, say, off, or who would you kill if you had the opportunity?
Well, probably Groucho Marx. Bob Hope. Yo La Tengo. Carrot Top. This dentist. I can't think of his name. Dentist in Culver City, California.

Is that the one that who your ex-wife is now with?
That's correct.

What would be your preferred method of murder?
Probably some sort of poisoned guacamole.

What is it then that's keeping you from acting? I mean, are you filled with hateful feelings, or is it just that we're discussing this hypothetical scenario?
Well no, I can't go on record with this sort of thing, because they've got laws – laws that protect the public from murder.

Are laws the only thing that's keeping you from murder, or do you consider yourself a moral person?
Hmm, I think I'm pretty moral, but sometimes you just do have to take a stand, you know? Some of these people – these terrorists. You know, Al-Qaeda, Carrot Top, that type of thing.

Back to some of these hot-button issues. What is your opinion on the legalization of marijuana?
Oh I don't want to see that happen. I don't really need more of these druggies coming to my show and, you know, stinking up the place with that. Can't get the smell out of my suit.

How about tax cuts? What's your opinion on that subject?
Well, I'll tell ya, I can really use one, because I owe a lot of money…an awful lot of money.

How about healthcare?
I could use some of that, because I have a lot of serious illness – unexplained, inexplicable pains and that type of thing.

Have you consulted a doctor about any of these matters?
No, but maybe through this interview we can get some doctor to get me a diagnosis or something. If anyone out there knows how to explain the unexplainable pain…please get in touch with me.

Maybe you can work some kind of deal out where the doctor contacts you, and then later you mention his name, perhaps while on television, or while performing?
I would be happy to do that. Definitely. And you can set that up for me. You know, you have all these ideas in this interview, but you never follow through on any of them. The last time I talked to you, you came up with a lot of great ideas for me, and none of those ever came to fruition either. You know, you just get my hopes up, and then you just dash them. You know I'm the one that's sleeping on these cots, and living in this dark, dark life. You shouldn't get peoples hopes up for medical care, and a world without Carrot Top, and that type of thing, if you can't come through on it. You know what I'm saying?

I just figure that, if we keep doing these interviews, eventually someone will read them and they'll come forward and provide assistance for you, and maybe even a little for myself, as well.
Well I would be happy to split the money with you, that's not a problem. But it just doesn't seem to be happening. We never got any of the pieces of the foam to make a bed out of, you know? None of this stuff ever pans out.

Well, I tried myself to build a mattress out of Tempur-Pedic Mattress samples, like I mentioned in the first interview we did. And, the mattress samples are just very, very small, and I wasn't able to do it.
But you know here, you've got the power of the press, and you ask everyone – you give the Tempur-Pedic address – ask everyone to get the samples, and to forward them to you, and you know – nine-thousand readers, do you think?

I think that's about right.
Well, if half of those readers send that mattress foam, you're set. And if half of your readers send twenty-five cents to an address that you put at the end of this article, and then you send twelve-and-a-half of it to me, and keep the other twelve-and-a-half for yourself…we should be okay. Because otherwise, we're going to be those people who slip through the cracks, and who you never hear about again, you know what I'm talking about?

Well I guess then, we can end the interview on this note, which is, I will give you the opportunity to make a request, or more than one request even, and perhaps some of the readers will oblige your request and help you out in some way.
Well I would say this: you're reading this interview right now, it's helping to pass the time – most of you people are working, you know, regular jobs – you're reading this at work, on company time. Getting paid for it. I'm asking you to take say, one-half of the amount of money you've earned during the reading of this interview, so that we're all partners in this thing, and sending it out to this magazine or newspaper. And then we will divide it up two ways, and you will get half and I'll get half. And if you're a person reading this interview, you're still getting paid decent money, while you read it. So everyone wins, you see? Nobody loses in this situation. And it could save, at least myself, from going down the financial drain. Because I'm playing bigger and bigger venues, but getting less and less money, you know what I'm saying. And to get the money from these readers would really, really make a difference in my life.

It seems like a fair proposition to me.
Because they're not giving up anything. They're getting paid to read our words. They're getting paid to read us talk. So why not we all get paid? Now, if it takes you five minutes to read this article, right, and you're making twenty dollars an hour – that's four dollars that you earned, just to read what we had to say. You know, you keep two for yourself – the reader keeps two – and then gives one to you, and one to me. How could anything be more fair than that?

I agree.
And if you're reading this and you're not at work, put it down and wait until you get to work, and read it there. And then you'll get paid. You will be paid to read this article. If you read it at home on your own time, we all lose. You gotta do it at work, while you're on the payroll.

It seems like, if they don't agree to what you're saying, it's almost like stealing.
Very much so. They're stealing from their own company, and they're stealing from us. The other way around, everyone wins. Draw some sort of chart, alongside the article, to explain this. It should be an easy chart to generate on a computer. Maybe have it be heart-shaped.

Well, I will have this interview typed-up for everyone to see as soon as possible, and hopefully we will both be seeing some income coming our way soon.
I hope so. I really hope so, for all of our sake. And if not, then these people have no heart. They have no soul. They're horrible – the bad karma. The karmic wheel will destroy them. They will be crushed, and they will deserve it. Because you don't freeload like that off of people who've given their all to entertain you. It's just not right. And you do not want to live your life knowing that you've done this, that you've hurt people as badly as you'll hurt us, if you don't split the income on this reading of this interview. You're getting paid to do this, you don't deserve all of the money. Think how much money is being generated from people reading this thing at work. You're talking thousands and thousands and thousands and tens of thousands of dollars. It's disgusting.

April 22, 2007

https://web.archive.org/web/20071014150454/benkharakh.com/neil_hamburger3

Neil Hamburger 3

Submitted by ben on Fri, 2007-05-11 12:21.

By Ben Kharakh

An edited version of this interview first appeared online on Austin's That Other Paper on April 22nd, 2007

Let's say money were no object for you. What would you do then, with your life?
I'd probably get some sort of nicer mattress, and just, you know, get involved in a very deep slumber. Try to sleep off some of the disappointment and pain that I've had over the last few years of doing these shows. And I think that's what it'd take, maybe get a nice sweater, something warm, you know. And that's something clean. And really take the time to just unwind and enjoy life. You know, maybe catch up on reading. That type of thing.

With the grueling schedule that you keep, how much time do you actually get to yourself to say, maybe sit down, have a nap, or glass of water?
Are you counting sitting down, having a nap and a glass of water while I'm driving, or do you mean when I'm not driving?

While not driving.
Because I do sit quite a bit, in the car. You know, you can usually have a glass of water at these venues. They often – not always, but often – they give you a glass of water. And a chair. Sometimes you sit on a barstool, that type of thing. So I would say from the time I get to a venue until the time I leave the venue, until the time I go onstage, you're looking at about two hours a day of that. But usually there's some horrible asshole rock and roll band playing some screaming music, you know, to distract from your thoughts, so you can't relax before the show.

How do you think you'd fair in some sort of prison-type scenario?
Well I think I'm living in a prison-type scenario, you know? Honestly, you know. I sleep on a cot. I do not really have any real privacy. I do not have any sort of income. These prisoners make more money stuffing envelopes than I make telling these jokes, you know what I'm saying. And it's only getting worse. I have not, you know, gotten any of the rape that you get in the prisons, that is something I have managed to avoid. And hopefully in 2007 we can continue to avoid that.

Have there been any times in your life when rape seemed like a horrible possibility?
Well, you know, sometimes there's people throwing apples and things at you onstage and you think that's just around the corner.

When people throw apples at you, do you usually, say, collect those and eat them later, or how do you deal with that?
Well, they bruise, but you can cut those bruises off. And yes, you would eat that apple, because a lot of times that's better than the slop that they're serving you at the show, in the rare case where your contract requires that you're given dinner.

If someone throws an apple at you, it makes me think of the warning people give little kids around Halloween that you shouldn't eat an apple if someone gives it to you, because there could be a razorblade inside.
Well there could be a razorblade inside, but that might be a blessing as well. I don't have enough food thrown at me or handed to me that I can afford to be picky with it, so I'm just going to eat it. If there's a razorblade, so be it. Maybe I'll get on the news that day, and that'd probably be some good publicity, right there.

So if you were walking down the street, and you found a Snickers bar, would you eat that?
Of course I would.

Under what circumstances, then, would you not eat a piece of food that you found?
Well, you know if it was completely spoiled. Now, we did a show on December 1st at Madison Square Garden. Have you heard of this place?

Yes.
This was huge. Biggest show I've done in quite some time. And you know, this one here, I was only the

opening act, but nonetheless, I was given my own dressing room. Now, I wish I could've stayed there and slept in that dressing room, because there was a couch in that dressing room, which is a very rare occurrence for me, you know what I'm saying? But unfortunately when the show was over, I was escorted out of the building and thrown out of there on my ear, and I could not sleep on this couch. But anyway, to get back to your question, Madison Square Garden, which has had the Pope and Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, Barbara Streisand, Michael Jackson – they've all performed here. It's a great, great venue. Andrew Dice Clay did a movie there. But I expected that the food that was served to me backstage would be the finest that there is, you know. Because it's certainly the most prestigious venue that I've ever performed at. Well, let me tell you what I had: they gave me a package of diabetic cookies – now I did not have diabetes, I do no know why this was given to me – four packages of miniature, vending machine-size Cheez-Its – which I did not request, and do not eat – and a gigantic bowl – now this bowl was probably two pounds – the contents of this bowl was avocado dip, guacamole. Now that sounds good, doesn't it? And we had a few potato chips there, and I scooped a bit of this guacamole up, and took a bite – this was going to be my dinner before hitting the stage at this wonderful venue – and I got the taste in my mouth of spoiled fish. Of fish, of canned tuna fish, that had been mixed with mayonnaise and then left out in the sun for a week. Nowhere in my mouth did I taste avocado, or anything that did not taste exactly like fish. Now I spit this out and I looked at the bowl, and it was green as green can be. As green as green beans, or as Mr. Green Jeans. But yet the taste was nothing at all like avocado – it was the taste of fish, of spoiled fish. How could they do that? Because you would think that a spoiled avocado dip would be a dark brown, or a grey. But this was beautiful, beautiful – as green as your eyes. And yet it had the flavor of fish. And this is what they served the acts of this prestigious venue. Now I later took this to Tenacious D and to some of the other folks on the tour and said, "Have a whiff of this. What does this smell like to you?" And people were literally having to suppress their gag reflex. This is what I was given to eat, along with some diabetic cookies. It just goes to show you, you can be at the top of your game, and still be dealing with the same frustrations that plague you when you're at the bottom of your game.

And did they send this to you by accident or on purpose?
Well, it was in – they had an ice chest, in which was some tonic water, some water, some Pepsi Cola, some Absolut brand vodka – which is a quality vodka, not the usual that I get, and this bowl of avocado dip. So it was on ice. I do not know if it was intentional, that they were trying to poison me, or what was going on. But I did think that I should bring it to your attention, since you are a journalist.

I think once people read this article, then artists of all sorts, musicians and comedians will know to be more careful once they're at Madison Square Garden.
Well I'll tell you one thing, they had The Who in there just a few days earlier. Am I to believe Roger Daltry was supposed to eat this stuff? I mean, this would make you gag – the few folks that tried it, gagged. No one could keep it in their mouth. This is the type of thing that if you eat it, you're rinsing your mouth out with mustard, if you could find it. Anything to get this flavor out, you know? I don't think Barbara Streisand would put up with this. And yet, it was wrapped in plastic wrap, and it appeared to be a completely legitimate bowl of food. So, I really wonder what was going on there, and I'm a little disappointed I have to say. You get fourteen, fifteen-thousand people there, even if they were to take, say, a third of a cent, add that to the price of each ticket – one-third of one cent – you would probably be able to get me the best guacamole on all of the East Coast with that kind of money.

Performing for that many people, what was that experience like?
Well, you know, they're all, they've got problems, these people there. They were chanting at me, you know. Chanting, "Asshole! Asshole!" You know. And that can throw you off. That's no way to have things go, you know what I'm saying?

I asked someone that went to the show, and they said it was mostly an audience of between 10 and 12 year olds. Was that the case?
Oh, I don't know. I didn't check their genitals, I don't know how old they were.

Have you performed in front of an audience of as young as 10, 12, or maybe even younger? Like at a children's party?
Yeah, I've done some children's parties, sure I have.

What are those experiences usually like?
Well, you've got to change your jokes, you can't be telling all the garbage humor that I normally tell, because the audiences these days are so sick, you know. So many problems. But the kids, they're not as sick. They're still sick, but they're not as sick. So, you know, you tone down the language. I mean, they still want to hear the obscene jokes, but you have to use the childish words for some of these phrases. You can't say "shit," you've got to say "doo-doo". But it's the same joke. You can't say "gang-bang," you've got to say "PTA meeting". You know, you've got to change it around a bit.

When you perform at a children's party, do you also have to dress differently? Do they request something like that of you?
No, you know, I couldn't dress differently, because I'm a professional, and I have, basically a uniform. Which is a uniform of a quality entertainer. So I don't know why you'd want me to come out in a dirty T-shirt with mustard stains like those jerks in Yo La Tengo would do. You know, that's not what I'm gonna do. It's always going to be about putting on a quality show with me.

I thought that perhaps they might ask that you be dressed as a cartoon character or something?
Well, you know, I could do that, if there were some sort of payment involved that was better than what I'm getting to do the shows I'm doing now. I'll tell ya, I'd gladly put on a mouse-head or moose-head or whatever it is.

Do you consider your jokes your children?
No, I have a child, you know. And that's a sad and strange sort of situation. But in some ways, I'm estranged from a lot my jokes, too. You know, they're just spit out, by remote control at this point.

Would you say that, like children, jokes need to be nurtured?
No, definitely not, you don't need to nurture these things. These things, you know, they're quite mature. If anything, some of them need a good spanking, if you know what I mean.

Are you talking about jokes or children?
Jokes.

Oh.
But you know, for the children, you sometimes have to do that to. Like I said, I'm not in contact with my child

at this point, but hopefully we can resolve that in the future.

How do you feel about spanking one's child as a form of punishment? What do you think of something like that?
Well, I'll tell you what, if these people at Madison Square Garden came out to see the way their children were behaving, I hope they would've smacked them all. Because you don't go to a venue like that, which is so historic, where the Pope has performed, and you don't go into that and call strangers, such as myself, "asshole." You know, that's not…that's not a good way to be, kids. So I would hope that these kids got the holy hell beaten out of them, quite honestly.

They say that children are the future. How do you feel, then about the future of the world, based on this experience?
Who says that? I don't think they say that.

I think I've heard it on television a couple of times.
Well, I think the children are not the future. The future is in folks like me, who are keeping people entertained. That is the future.

What do you think must be done then, with children?
Well I think they should spend some money on my albums, and come to the show. That's an investment in all of our futures.

Have you taken any measures to make your show more accessible to children?
Like wheelchair ramps?

I don't know, it just seems like if you get them young, they are more likely to spend more of their money on Neil Hamburger.
Well yeah, that's definitely a strategy we're hoping to take. Do you know anything about how to get these kids involved?

I know cigarette companies use a mascot. Like they had that Joe Camel to get people excited.
I think that Joe Campbell, I don't think that Campbell cigarettes is allowed to use Joe Campbell anymore. I think they lost the legal battle on that one. So I don't think I can use Joe Campbell.

Well there's a lot of cigarettes in different movies, and that makes it look like smoking is cool.
So maybe I should start smoking. I don't know if that would help sell those cigarettes, but if that's what it takes to move those cigarettes, I guess I can do it, if that's what you're asking.

You appeared in the Tenacious D movie, perhaps you could take that route as well.
Smoking in the movie? I think the movie has already come and gone, it's a little too late to smoke in that scene.

Have you found that, having appeared in this movie that your star has risen a little bit?
Well, it's probably too early to tell. You know, I would like to think so. I just shot a TV show, just yesterday. There's a new show – have you heard of these guys Tim and Eric?

Yes.
These guys, they've got a new TV show, because they know what they're doing. So, they've got a new television program and they had me come in, and they shot an episode yesterday, in which I'm playing a taxi driver. With a taxicab called "Hamburger Taxi". Anyway, we shot this thing yesterday. So you know, you get your occasional moments of light amongst all the darkness, you know what I'm saying? Such as a movie or TV appearance, or some of this avocado dip that isn't spoiled, which we had a couple nights later, in Atlanta. We had an avocado dip which really, was really not bad at all.

You also have recorded something for the Stars network, correct?
That's right! Are you some sort of stalker person? How do you know this…what is this?

I had researched you beforehand to see what you were up to.
So you're just a good journalist, then. Yes, we did something for a program called, Special Sauce. I believe it airs in April. Now, this was a situation where they had an audience of pig-people in Las Vegas, who were asked to come out and laugh at some of the new comedians, some of the up-and-comers. And these pig-people really tried their best to make me look bad by having the sour, you know, the lemon faces. I don't know if they can fix that in editing or not, but it was not a pleasant five minutes for me, believe me. Unlike working with the Tim and Eric folk, who are a pleasure be around, you know?

And what do you mean by "pig-people"?
Well, you watch the show when it comes out and take a

look at these people, and you tell me they're not pig-people.

Do you find yourself often performing in front of garish, unattractive crowds?
It has happened, you know? Now, the funny thing is, we did a show in Las Vegas about a week after the taping of the Special Sauce television extravaganza. About a week later, we did a show there at the House of Blues, which is a very prestigious nightclub, I'm sure you've heard of it. And this was a show Tenacious D, and I have to say that the audience at that show was quite nice. The pig-people had left Las Vegas. It really was a real feather in the cap, that show, so, you just don't know what you're going to get. Generally, you do see some faces out there that you don't want to look at.

How do you usually deal with performing in front of an entire crowd of pig-people?
Well, I just do the show that I am trained to do. I just keep on going and do the best that I can, you know? You don't want to ever let down your guard, you don't want to let these people shake you a little bit. You know, we had some people in the United Kingdom a couple weeks ago, who insisted on throwing these two-pence coins, you know? Which is not a very nice thing to do. But, you can't let it affect you, you've got to do your job. You've got to continue on, anyway, regardless, and tell the jokes you were paid to tell. So, no, to answer your question, I will not bow to these pig-people.

How much of the population of America, would you say, is so unattractive that you could call them pig-people?
It's not strictly a physical thing. It has a lot to do with their personality, their way of life, these pig-people. And their response to my show. You know, what they've had for dinner. If they went to Sbarro, have you ever been to that place?

No.
Do you know the place I'm talking about?

The name sounds familiar. Is that the place where for dessert, they cover something in a thing leaf of gold?
I don't think so. This is the place where they have a gigantic vat, as big as a swimming pool, full of burnt, old tomato sauce. And then they have another giant vat, filled with over-cooked, limp pasta noodles, which are just disintegrating, turning to dust because they're so old. And then they mix a little grease in with that. And

then they just combine these two ingredients and serve it up. Usually on the New Jersey Turnpike, at the stops, you'll see this Sbarro. Or, other times, you'll be at shopping malls, airports. It's a very popular chain.

Oh!
That's where the pig-people eat.

I've heard of it. It's the place at food-courts that sells Italian food.
Yeah, yeah. S-B-A-R-R-O. That is some bad, bad food. That's what the pig-people eat.

Do you think that by bad-mouthing the Sbarro people, you could be costing yourself an endorsement deal?
No, because they don't have television advertisements for celebrities, so I'm not worried about it. And because I don't think I could eat their food on camera and smile afterwards, like I'd be needing to do. This food, you know, it'll make you sick. Have you had this food?

No.
Don't. That's my advice.

Are there any products that you'd be willing to endorse that perhaps you wouldn't approve of using?
Yeah, there's quite a few actually. Pretty much anything. Except Sbarro.

To bring this around to how we were discussing cigarettes, you'd be willing to be a spokesperson for say, Marlboro or Newport?
Well, as long as I didn't have to say that I liked their product. You know, as long as I could do the ad and mention that I didn't like the product in the ad, I'd be very happy to advertise, and help promote their product.

What are some companies that you've been associated with in the past, in terms of endorsements, or spoke speaking?
I did a public service announcement for the, what is it? The National Association for the Prevention of Falling Merchandise. Because you have these giant warehouse stores, with the products stacked up to the ceiling, big stuff falls down and kills people, all the time. You know, there's support groups for victims of falling merchandise, the families of the victims of falling merchandise, that sort of thing, and a couple years ago, when I was in Chicago I was asked to do some public service announcements, and act in the capacity as a spokesperson for this, and so I did. Free of charge. Just to help the cause.

Are there any other causes that you strongly believe in?
Well, you know I believe that there should be laws in place, minimum-wage laws for comedians, because these fry-cooks get their $5.15 an hour. And these guys that clean the toilets in the Chevron stations, they're getting paid, even the toilets aren't often clean, you know? Yet the comedians, we can do a show, and there's no minimum-wage. We'll get nothing. And I think that should be changed.

Have you ever thought of running for some sort of political office?
I would like to get some sort of job as some sort of public servant, because that pays very well, but I don't think it's in the cards, honestly.

What do you think of the current political situation in America? What do you think of the President?
Well, you know, I think we've had some better Presidents than this one, sorry to report. He may not be number one on the list, you know what I'm saying? But, you know, he is the President, so you do have to pay attention to what he says, in order to develop some jokes, at his expense. Which would then turn into comedic gold. And that's been going on well before this President, or the one before that, or even another dozen before those. Because these guys are the butt of all of our jokes, so you have to thank them for that.

As a comedian, do you think you might've had an advantage if you had been performing during the term of a more hilarious President of some sort?
Yeah, you know the Millard Fillmore comedians – the jokes wrote themselves, shall we say. So it is tough. But you know, we do the best we can. You can still recycle some of the other jokes, you know. You get the George Bush jokes, from the first George Bush, and you twist them around a little bit and apply them to this guy, or you take an old Calvin Coolidge joke and you want to spice it up a little bit with a little more sex, and make it into a George W. Bush joke – you know, it can be done. You just have to have the years of experience that I do in this business to get away with something like that, you know? I would not suggest to an amateur that you try to turn a Warren Harding joke into a Bill Clinton joke, because you might make an asshole of yourself, you know what I'm saying?

How about other world leaders, of past and present?
It's all fair game, you know? We can tell a joke about that guy – the Pringles guy on the can, you know, with the mustache. We can tell a joke about anybody. Because you know, they have not restricted the freedom of speech for comedians at this point, which is one of the great things we have going for us. Now what we don't have going for us, as comedians, is any sort of pay-scale that is reasonable, or even humane. Any sort of working conditions – rules that would make sure the working conditions are reasonable, so that you could maybe have a screen in front of you onstage, so when people throw apples, the screen intercepts these apples, and they don't hit you. Maybe when you are given water by someone backstage, that you'll know it doesn't have trichinosis in it, that you'll know it's pure, clean water. Some of these venues, you know, they'll scrape it right out from the inside of a toilet bowl and give it to you, you know. They don't care, they have nothing to gain by being respectful to their performers – they're one step down from the guy who mops the floor at the end of the night, you know what I'm saying?

Now, I'm just curious to know, what do you think of some of the hot topic issues that people often discuss? What's your opinion on gay marriage?
Gay marriage?

Yes.
I think that would be just a wonderful marriage to attend, if they have some sort of free food there. Because it's very hard for me to get paid enough to eat some of these hors d'oeuvres that they have at a gay marriage. And I really do like these little crackers from England – water, water crackers are they called? I tried the things you might find at a gay marriage, some of the brie cheeses that are very expensive, and you fill your pockets at these so-called gay marriages, and then you sell them to people at the show, before you go on, at your merch stand, you know, half-price on these cheeses. And I would definitely like to get some fruit, because that's good for you. You get that at the gay marriages – sliced pears, peaches, cantaloupes, watermelon – all these exotic fruits that you just can't afford normally. Mandarin orange. All that stuff. It's fantastic.

What was that last one?
Mandarin orange.

The one after that.
There was no fruit after that.

Oh, sorry.
But you know, there could be. You might have a cumquat. Or a pomegranate. Free of charge.

What's your opinion on abortion?
Well I don't think that abortion clinics really do have much in the way of free food, so I can't say that I'd be too excited to attend an abortion. I'd much rather go to a gay wedding.

How about the war on Iraq?
Now I would like to avoid attending that altogether. Although, you know, I'm always happy to perform for our troops, if they want to hear what I have to say, but generally they don't.

Have you had any sort of military experience?
Well I've performed before a few military folks, but I have not served in the line of duty, if that's what you're saying. Although I'll tell you what, performing before those British the other day, it felt like some sort of war was going on.

In what respect?
Well, you know, they're screaming some of the anti-American sentiments toward me, and throwing some of the British coins at me, you know. And I'll tell you what, our President, he really needs to get something going in terms of putting more weight on our coins. Because those British two-cent coins – those hurt. You get hit with one of those things, that'll take your eye out. As opposed to, what do we have? We don't even have two-cent coin, and a one-cent coin isn't going to hurt anybody, you know? You need to get these things together if you're going to win these wars.

Do you think that, if you had to, that you'd be capable of serving in the war? Or, do you think, if pressed to it, that you'd be able to kill another person?
I think that I might not be the best choice, but on the other hand, the pay might be a little bit better, you know?

But do you think you could kill someone?
I think I could do it. I think I could gladly do it with some of these people. Carrot Top, that type of thing.

Who else, would you then, given the opportunity, who would you, say, off, or who would you kill if you had the opportunity?
Well, probably Groucho Marx. Bob Hope. Yo La Tengo. Carrot Top. This dentist. I can't think of his name. Dentist in Culver City, California.

Is that the one that who your ex-wife is now with?
That's correct.

What would be your preferred method of murder?
Probably some sort of poisoned guacamole.

What is it then that's keeping you from acting? I mean, are you filled with hateful feelings, or is it just that we're discussing this hypothetical scenario?
Well no, I can't go on record with this sort of thing, because they've got laws – laws that protect the public from murder.

Are laws the only thing that's keeping you from murder, or do you consider yourself a moral person?
Hmm, I think I'm pretty moral, but sometimes you just do have to take a stand, you know? Some of these people – these terrorists. You know, Al-Qaeda, Carrot Top, that type of thing.

Back to some of these hot-button issues. What is your opinion on the legalization of marijuana?
Oh I don't want to see that happen. I don't really need more of these druggies coming to my show and, you know, stinking up the place with that. Can't get the smell out of my suit.

How about tax cuts? What's your opinion on that subject?
Well, I'll tell ya, I can really use one, because I owe a lot of money…an awful lot of money.

How about healthcare?
I could use some of that, because I have a lot of serious illness – unexplained, inexplicable pains and that type of thing.

Have you consulted a doctor about any of these matters?
No, but maybe through this interview we can get some doctor to get me a diagnosis or something. If anyone out there knows how to explain the unexplainable pain…please get in touch with me.

Maybe you can work some kind of deal out where the doctor contacts you, and then later you mention his name, perhaps while on television, or while performing?
I would be happy to do that. Definitely. And you can set that up for me. You know, you have all these ideas in this interview, but you never follow through on any of them. The last time I talked to you, you came up with a lot of great ideas for me, and none of those ever came to fruition either. You know, you just get my hopes up, and then you just dash them. You know I'm the one that's sleeping on these cots, and living in this dark, dark life. You shouldn't get peoples hopes up for medical care, and a world without Carrot Top, and that type of thing, if you can't come through on it. You know what I'm saying?

I just figure that, if we keep doing these interviews, eventually someone will read them and they'll come forward and provide assistance for you, and maybe even a little for myself, as well.
Well I would be happy to split the money with you, that's not a problem. But it just doesn't seem to be happening. We never got any of the pieces of the foam to make a bed out of, you know? None of this stuff ever pans out.

Well, I tried myself to build a mattress out of Tempur-Pedic Mattress samples, like I mentioned in the first interview we did. And, the mattress samples are just very, very small, and I wasn't able to do it.
But you know here, you've got the power of the press, and you ask everyone – you give the Tempur-Pedic address – ask everyone to get the samples, and to forward them to you, and you know – nine-thousand readers, do you think?

I think that's about right.
Well, if half of those readers send that mattress foam, you're set. And if half of your readers send twenty-five cents to an address that you put at the end of this article, and then you send twelve-and-a-half of it to me, and keep the other twelve-and-a-half for yourself…we should be okay. Because otherwise, we're going to be those people who slip through the cracks, and who you never hear about again, you know what I'm talking about?

Well I guess then, we can end the interview on this note, which is, I will give you the opportunity to make a request, or more than one request even, and perhaps some of the readers will oblige your request and help you out in some way.
Well I would say this: you're reading this interview right now, it's helping to pass the time – most of you people are working, you know, regular jobs – you're reading this at work, on company time. Getting paid for it. I'm asking you to take say, one-half of the amount of money you've earned during the reading of this interview, so that we're all partners in this thing, and sending it out to this magazine or newspaper. And then we will divide it up two ways, and you will get half and I'll get half. And if you're a person reading this interview, you're still getting paid decent money, while you read it. So everyone wins, you see? Nobody loses in this situation. And it could save, at least myself, from going down the financial drain. Because I'm playing bigger and bigger venues, but getting less and less money, you know what I'm saying. And to get the money from these readers would really, really make a difference in my life.

It seems like a fair proposition to me.
Because they're not giving up anything. They're getting paid to read our words. They're getting paid to read us talk. So why not we all get paid? Now, if it takes you five minutes to read this article, right, and you're making twenty dollars an hour – that's four dollars that you earned, just to read what we had to say. You know, you keep two for yourself – the reader keeps two – and then gives one to you, and one to me. How could anything be more fair than that?

I agree.
And if you're reading this and you're not at work, put it down and wait until you get to work, and read it there. And then you'll get paid. You will be paid to read this article. If you read it at home on your own time, we all lose. You gotta do it at work, while you're on the payroll.

It seems like, if they don't agree to what you're saying, it's almost like stealing.
Very much so. They're stealing from their own company, and they're stealing from us. The other way around, everyone wins. Draw some sort of chart, alongside the article, to explain this. It should be an easy chart to generate on a computer. Maybe have it be heart-shaped.

Well, I will have this interview typed-up for everyone to see as soon as possible, and hopefully we will both be seeing some income coming our way soon.
I hope so. I really hope so, for all of our sake. And if not, then these people have no heart. They have no soul. They're horrible – the bad karma. The karmic wheel will destroy them. They will be crushed, and they will deserve it. Because you don't freeload like that off of people who've given their all to entertain you. It's just not right. And you do not want to live your life knowing that you've done this, that you've hurt people as badly as you'll hurt us, if you don't split the income on this reading of this interview. You're getting paid to do this, you don't deserve all of the money. Think how much money is being generated from people reading this thing at work. You're talking thousands and thousands and thousands and tens of thousands of dollars. It's disgusting.

2006-02-04

By Ben Kharakh

https://web.archive.org/web/20071017181140/benkharakh.com/neil_hamburger

In which Neil Hamburger schemes, discusses Amway, warns of the dangers of diet cola, and amuses with anecdotes of life on the road.

How are you doing?

Never better, really. We're plugging along with this and we'll just see what happens.

How was your trip to Australia?

That was very rewarding because of some of the people there, the smiles on their faces, and that type of thing. We filmed a new DVD while we were there. It's always exciting when you give yourself the chance to be immortalized. Very few incidents with having to call security to deal with the hecklers or some of the more violent people that come to the shows some times.

Did you happen to do any site seeing while you were there?

You do get to see the oddball thing here or there. Sometimes, you're driving to a show and you have to swerve to avoid hitting a kangaroo. To them, that's an old hat, but to me it's pretty exciting.

Are you apprehensive about long flights like that?

No, I welcome them. It gives me a chance to collect my thoughts. Normally, I'm so busy with these shows that I don't have the time to do that. I think, mentally, it's probably a good process to just be sitting there with your thoughts.

How would you compare the Australian audiences with American audiences?

These people have six fingers on each hand, but other than that you're looking at the same thing. People that have a lot of burdens in life, woes, failed relationships, people who are considering suicide, and they're all coming out to the night club for one reason and that is to forget their problems. Hopefully we can provide that to these people and to anyone who needs a laugh.

When did you develop an interest in comedy?

What makes you think I have an interest in comedy?

Well, you are a comedian.

This is just something that I've had to do. We continue to keep this thing going because at this point there's no choice. When you spend enough time doing this as I have, it's very hard to turn back and find a lucrative career.

Would you say, then, that your urge to do comedy is something that you were born with?

Yes, it was there long long ago. I thought that that was something I could do, but the verdict is still out on that one. In the meantime I keep plugging away because it's all I know. How much do you get paid for doing these interviews? Is this, maybe, a more lucrative thing that I should be looking into?

I do these interviews for free. It's a service to people who are interested in learning more about comedy.

Doing something for free that is a service to people, I think, sums up my career pretty well. I'll just keep on going until the body gives out.

What were you like in school?

It was not one of the best experiences I've had because they do have a lot of regulations and many of the students were not very friendly. It's hard to succeed in that sort of environment. And then there's the loneliness. This is not something I'd recommend to anyone starting out in life. If you can get away from it, I'd recommend it.

What sort of aspirations did you have as a child?

I didn't have any, really. Eventually, I decided that I could make a career out of telling jokes. I'd seen people doing it and it seemed like the way to go to bring some joy to people. There's a real lack of joy in the world, if you read history. I don't know if you have an encyclopedia, but if you look through it you'll see that this has been a problem for a long time. If there are people that can do something about it, they should. And I thought I could, but now I'm wondering. We'll keep doing the shows anyway. We've got shows booked through the rest of the year.

Would you say that, growing up, television is something that impacted you greatly?

We had a little black and white TV and I'm afraid I did spend some time with it. I can't say that it was the best influence, but it's there. I think all of this in this world would have to agree that this is something that there's no getting away from. At this point, I'm more concerned with getting on the television, and that's a whole other kettle of fish.

Were you incorporating humor into your daily routine in school?

You have to in order to survive. Some of these kids can take you out permanently. There's a vein in your neck, I think, and if these kids pinch that hard enough that's it for you. You need to use whatever weapon you have. In my case, not having access to the martial arts, the only thing I could do was get these kids to smile or laugh. I definitely told my fair share of jokes to save myself, as I do today.

When is it that you decided to perform standup as a career?

I had been out into a program for troubled teens. The counselor suggested that standup would be a good way for us to exorcise some of our demons. They worked out a deal with a local comedy club to let us come in the afternoon and do a little standup show. Most of them were more interested in doing drugs in the bathroom, but I actually got up there and told some jokes that I wrote for the occasion. It was a very fulfilling thing for me. That's when I thought, "I don't have to just sit and listen to these comedy records at home. I can be the one making them."

When you say, "troubled teen," what sort of trouble were you in?

Not being very popular is a trouble. They want these kids to be on the cheer squad, football, the debating squad, and that sort of things. They want to give the more withdrawn sort of kids medication, if they can, or put them in some sort of room where they lock them in after school and they can't leave. That was the program I was in.

How old were you the first time you performed?

I don't like to give out ages, at all. My management says that that's the best way to get yourself screwed right out of a deal. Once you start telling the age, then there's always someone younger that they can give that role to. You do want to keep some things secret.

How many open mics were you doing at the time?

As many as I could do. I had a map and I circled every one in town. I would take the bus from one to the next. There wasn't much else going on for me, or still is really. I would do four a night, if I could find that many. Of course, here in Los Angeles, you do have that many.

How would you say that your material has changed with time?

The material hasn't really changed. You don't want to change something like that once you've figured it out. We do bring in new jokes to satisfy the kids that come out, but, honestly, it's not like everybody has seen my act. We don't get a lot of repeat customers, so if you tell the same jokes you were telling thirty years ago, I don't think anyone would really notice.

How long was it before you moved up to middling or emceeing?

I would do the open mics, tell my jokes, and sometimes they would say, "Neil, we need somebody to wash these pizza pans after the shows." And I would do it. Or, they'd say, "We have a birthday event this weekend that needs an emcee, can you do that?" "We have an open mic that needs a host, can you do that?" "We have a corporate event, we need someone to take care of." "Can you wash those rags, the health department is going to do an inspection." You get those requests and you fulfill them because that's what you're supposed to do as a comedian.

Is emceeing something that you enjoy doing?

I have had some luck with that here and there. I did some of that at some music festivals in Britain. Introducing some of the young bands, they scream, and that sort of thing. Then you come out, introduce the next one, and they come out and scream. I did some emceeing at Australia at one of the comedy clubs for the, shall we say, ungrateful comedians because they didn't have much good to say about me. Still, you introduce them the best way you can. The problem with it is that the wool tuxedo that I wear is quite hot. If I'm emceeing, I'm in that thing for hours and hours. It's gets quite damp with the human sweat.

You started doing these open mics. What were the next several years like?

Pretty much as they are now. You hook up with one of these agents and then they work you to the bone. If they can get you to do a show in the afternoon and then drive four hundred miles to do a show in the evening, they'll do it. There's no regard for the time, distance, or your help. We've had as many as 472 shows in one year. Last year we had 399. It does take its toll on you and the voice wears out. We've had to look in to get a coating for the inside of the throat. Some sort of Teflon or something. I don't know if they make this. Things do wear out, things fall apart, marriages dissolve, relationships with your children become strained, the car repairs, and the tires. I wish I could keep count of the amount of shows that I've done. Must be in the tens of thousands at this point.

What were you doing to support yourself financially at the time?

With these shows that they book, there's usually enough money that covers the fuel and you send the rest off to the agency. You hope that these venues give you some food. A lot of them are pizza restaurants, and sometimes they'll give you some slices. Sometimes you get scraps from the people that ordered an extra large pizza, watched half of your show, and then stormed out. Hopefully you can get a hold of those extra slices that they left. There is not a lot of income. There is money being generated, but I owe it all to the book agents, the management, and the attorneys. It's going to be a few more years until any of this money works its way into my pocket, which is one of the reasons the marriage failed and why I have such a high burden of debt at this point. You just hope that you can move onto the next step where you're earning a living doing something like this.

You mention your ex-wife quite a bit on your albums. What's the situation now?

We can't mention it during any more of the CDs because they took offense to some of the comments on those CDs. The ex-wife and her current shack-up lover, who's a dentist, took offense. Now they're getting the royalties on those CDs, which I don't think is fair. We have six CDs out and the courts in Los Angeles ruled in their favor that this is a form of harassment and defamation of character. Just for telling a couple of little jokes on a CD and they get all of the royalties. We argued that if the jokes are one minute out of forty-five that they would get one forty-fifth of the income, but, no, they had the better attorney so they get it all. In the meantime, I owe my attorney quite a bit of money and the whole thing was a mess.

How is your relationship with your daughter now?

I think she's been poisoned by this dentist. He's been telling her that my jokes aren't very good. Apparently, he cracks jokes as a dentist, as a side thing. Giving people the drugs that he gives them, of course they're going to laugh. They're resistance is worn down. You get that sort of thing going on where they think they're the real comedians, but he couldn't get a booking to save his life. It's unfortunate that my daughter has fallen under his spell. That's something I'd like to look into legally.

Is your daughter showing any aspirations of becoming a comedian herself?

She's more into this crappy music that they have nowadays. The girls that shriek and moan all over the drum machine. What is the girl that's so popular?

Jennifer Lopez?

Could be. She's got the hits on the charts, and that's what they're interested in, these girls. It's too bad that that wasn't the career path that I pursued because otherwise I might have a daughter that respected me.

How much improvisation do you incorporate into your performances?

When you drop something on your foot, you may let out an improvised remark. Spill a drink and the cold water hits your leg and you might shriek a comment that's off

2006-02-04
By Ben Kharakh
https://web.archive.org/web/20071017181140/benkharakh.com/neil_hamburger

the cuff. You got to watch out for that because, a lot of times, these guys that are improvising think that it's funnier than it actually is. I don't know if you've seen this show Whose Life is it Anyway? They're all just laughing at each other and that's a lot of fun, but then if you look at the people in the crowd and they bring their own blindfolds so that they can take a nap during the show. The comedians have got quite a racquet going. They keep laughing at each other, the show gets renewed, and it keeps on going, but meanwhile people are praying for the commercials to come on so that they can have something to laugh at.

Do you think that humor in commercials helps move product?

I've been saying that for a long time to some of these companies trying to get some work in that field, but they don't seem to agree. We were trying to get some work with those Priceline people. I use it quite a bit to book hotel rooms. I used to sleep on cots. I'd travel with a cot in the back of the car for a long time and we would find these rest areas. I had a whole book that would tell you where all of the public rest areas were in the United States. You set one of these cots up out there, get a nap, and that's free of charge. But now, we got a little more money coming in, and the management has approved that we can get a hotel two or three nights a week. Priceline has been great for that. My feeling is that you get a much higher quality hotel at the price that you were paying to stay at one of these crack houses. That was the campaign I took to them. I said, "You can show these crack houses, people shooting up, syringes under the pillow cases, and all of the things I put up with." Some of the hairs, pubic hairs in the sink. Are people washing their balls in the sinks of the hotels? That's not good. I thought that we could show all of that filth and squalor that I was usually paying thirty dollars a night for and then show me staying at the Ramada Inn, the Days Inn, Best Western. This type of a place for the same price, thanks to Priceline. It could really show how it made a difference in this comedian's life. That was the ad campaign we proposed and of course they never responded.

What are some changes that you've noticed in comedy since getting involved?

It's more crowded. You have a lot more of these people coming in. A lot of the pizza houses have closed down. That was a circuit where you could work and do the Monday night comedy and pizza deal. All of these chains, Pizza Hut, Dominos, have come in and shut that whole thing down. That's too bad.

How do you feel about your albums being available on file sharing networks?

That's a real shame. It's like what Jesus himself said, "You should appreciate me while I'm here because I'm not going to be around forever." I'm not speaking just for me. I'm speaking for all the struggling acts out there. There comes a time when you realize, "Geeze, we made a new record but only put out two copies, but five thousand people have this album." That doesn't give you much reason to make another album because you're not getting any income, it's getting harder and harder, and next thing you know you're taking a job at Jack in the Box and not making an album. It's the only way you can survive. It's not the case of being a greedy person, like the guys in Metallica. It's if you want to sustain this at all and give people the joy that they're looking for. You would how that they would pay you the same way that they would pay a plumber that comes to remove the bowel movements that have clogged up their plumbing. These people are under no obligation to pay, but if they want another album and the one after that, they're going to have to pay the piper because other wise us artists will crawl under a rock and die.

What are some misconceptions about standup that you'd like to clear up?

I think that a lot of people think that there's a lot of glamour and money, but there isn't. It's a lot of hard work and some of the other standups will stab you in the kidneys if they can. Not all of them. I do know quite a few comedians that are very good people. But then you have the odd ball that's there with a rusty knife to give you lockjaw because that's something that you don't recover from. You turn your back at an open mic and bingo! That's it for your kidneys or liver. They know where you're vulnerable. Those internal organs, you don't want to have those replaced.

Have you personally been physically attacked by another comedian?

No, but I have heard them whispering about me.

I often hear people say that they want to move to LA to do comedy. When do you think that they should make such a move if they should make such a move at all?

Well, I have noticed that a lot of these comedy clubs in Los Angeles seem to think that we're all so desperate to get those laughs and be seen. You want to have yourself out there because maybe some big producer will be out there and you'll end up with your own Seinfeld type show. These club owners realize that they've got you and they just don't pay you. You go do a show in Des Moines, Iowa like I have, there may be eight people there but you'll get paid like you've been promised. You do a show in LA, there might be two hundred people there roaring with laughter as if they were one, and then at the end of the evening the man that runs the club might flip you a fifty cent piece. That's pretty sad. I warn people that it's very competitive in Los Angeles. I live, right now, on the road. I have no home, but I do a fair number of shows each year in Los Angeles because you do pass through it on your way to Chino or Courtside, Arizona.

Are you noticing that comedian is a career that young people aspire to have?

I think most of them are more into dealing drugs instead. That's what they see as a more lucrative type of job.

Is this something that saddens you?

I think it's probably better because these guys are younger, more violent, and they'll probably take bookings from me and some of the other comedians that have been putting so much into their craft. We really don't need these young up and comers with that sort of attitude sending us out to pasture, essentially.

Have you seen Last Comic Standing?

No, I haven't. I don't have a TV anymore. Sometimes at the hotel you'll have a TV, but a lot of times I just don't have the time to watch much of it.

Are you familiar with the concept?

That's where they have all of the comedians locked on an island with all of the topless girls where they eat bamboo and whoever lives the longest is crowned the survivor, right?

There's also some comedy involved and people voting over the phone to see who they think is the funniest comedian.

People have mentioned that to me. I had a couple of opening acts here and there that have been on the show who seemed that they might be someone I would know, but of course I didn't. Is this something I should be trying to see?

I was thinking that it might be something that you'd be more interested in auditioning for.

Well, they don't really like me on these types of shows. That's the sad thing. I was booked on National Lampoon's Funny Money. I used to read the old National Lampoon magazine in the 1970's. In fact, that was really one of the things that made me want to tell my jokes. Just the pure joy you get from reading that thing. In the 1970's, National Lampoon was very funny. They kept it going and it was not so funny. They started attaching the name to these programs that had nothing to do with that kind of a laugh. I was booked on Funny Money and that was quite exciting. Two days before they were going to film, the producer saw some of my footage or heard one of my albums and they went and canceled me. Said I wasn't suitable. I had been promised eight hundred dollars. This is the sort of thing that wears you out and that's why there's a lot of alcoholism amongst comedians, drug abuse, and comedians saying that they wished that they would die.

If you were to appear even briefly on Last Comic Standing, the exposure would bring you national prominence. Are you familiar with Todd Glass?

He's one of the ones that I like.

He was on there. He didn't make it to the final showdown, but his participation helped him a lot.

Isn't he too good got to be in one of these competitions? Isn't this for the riff-raff and not the guys like him that really know what they're doing?

Almost everyone that made it onto the show was experienced.

So the show is a fraud.

In a way, but I think it would be a good opportunity for you.

There's some television that I've done. I was on a show recently in Australia that's like Siskel and Ebert. They had me on to talk about The Aristocrats. I had a write up recently in the New York Times. I had a five-page article in High Society and the next month I had a three-page article in Hustler saying, "You've got to go see this guy." I've noticed that because everyone's mind is so distracted by some of these sweeteners that they have in the diet colas. I don't think that they can really follow up on something that they see. In the old days, you'd get an appearance on one of these shows and, bingo, you're set. But now you've got one hundred and ninety thousand TV channels and they're all hyped up on saccharine, Nutrasweet, and that type of thing. They don't remember. You might see Neil Hamburger on Last Comic Standing on Monday night and then Tuesday he's playing across the street from you and you don't even know who he is. Or even who you are. You're going to hear a lot more about Alzheimer's, I think, in the news.

Why do you think it is that comedy doesn't get much attention magazine wise?

I think that the sad truth is that the paper and magazines are expensive these days. Unfortunately, a lot of people are more interested in looking at the mirror at themselves, doing their drugs, and listening to this rubbish music rather than sitting down and reading about the people that are bringing them all this joy. These comedians can really change lives and it's sad that people don't give them the recognition that they deserve.

I'm told that a big part of comedy is networking, but do you have any experience with the other type of networking: Amway?

That was something I tried to do. I thought, here I am doing the show and I've got a spellbound audience every night, why not try to sell them some soap after the show? We have CDs, a DVD, Neil Hamburger T-shirts, fridge magnets, and shot glasses. People do buy that stuff and it's fine, but people will say, "Geez, Neil Hamburger, the show is good but wasn't so good that I need one of your T-shirts. I'm going home." So you would lose out on that income. So I thought, "What they are going to need is laundry detergent. Shampoo. Whether or not they like my jokes, they're going to have to wash their hair." We had the Amway and I had the trunk of my car filled with this stuff and my order book. Eventually, the organization actually dropped me because they didn't like the tone of some of the jokes I was telling. They didn't think I was representing the company very well. Now what I do is I go to the ninety-nine cent only store, which they have all over the country, and I'll buy the laundry detergent there, bring them to the show, and then I can mark those things to get a higher market profit margin. We get the Rinso brand dish washing liquid. I have a case of that in my car right now. I sign the bottles with indelible ink. "Thanks for laughing at me. Neil Hamburger," sign that on the back of the dishwashing detergent. This is a good dish washing detergent. Go to the Rinso website, you'll see that they use good surfactants. We sell that at the show for three dollars. I think if you go down to your regular supermarket, it's pretty close to three dollars. It's more convenient for these people to buy this detergent after the show and we cut Amway out of the picture all together.

How did your wife feel about Amway?

She was into it as well, but she had her own way of selling it, which is the way that they teach. I had my way, which was to sell it at the shows. I think that they're more interested in selling it to your friends, neighbors, postman, and everyone you know. I'm selling it to these audiences and I was actually making pretty good money. I had a joke that was a little bit off color and they had one of their regional representatives that came to the show to see how I was doing this. It's a

2006-02-04
By Ben Kharakh
https://web.archive.org/web/20071017181140/benkharakh.com/neil_hamburger

family company and you don't criticize the president, especially not with the four letter words. I tried to explain to the guy, "Look, this is my job. People that come out to the show are not going to be happy unless they hear shit, piss, and all of these swear words that are so popular. And I just have to do it that way." He said, "Fine, but not with our products on the stage." I had a little table set-up with a sort of pyramid of Amway products. Sometimes someone would throw an orange at me and it would miss and hit the Amway pyramid. Then you got all of these products all over the floor, which was too bad.

Are you familiar with the Tempurpedic Mattress?

I have been trying to find one of those in the thrift stores to put in my car because the springs have come out of the seats. I've seen the TV ad and that looks like you'd really get a goodnight's sleep.

Are you aware that they offer samples of it?

The little square? I thought I could get a few of those and put it together.

Yes!

When you call, they know that you've already gotten the sample and you won't get another one. Maybe we could get a bunch of people together, a bunch of comedians. How many comedians have you interviewed for your website?

About forty.

That's perfect. And how many of them are millionaires?

They don't disclose their finances like they used to.

That's what you've got to ask because that's what the audience wants to know. But, whatever the case, if we have them all get together and order those squares, you've got a good idea there. We piece together the one mattress and then we trade it amongst ourselves. Of course, since it was your idea, you get it for at least a couple of nights a month as well. That could work out.

I think if you got your audience to order those samples beforehand you wouldn't even need to divvy up the mattress between the other comedians. You could have it all to yourself.

Oh my God, that's a good idea. Is there a link to the free thing? There's a gal who does my website, she could put a link up there, and then they could send the squares. It's not a very big square, is it?

No, it's about the size of a sponge.

But it's as thick as the mattress would be?

You might need as many as two thousand of these squares to make a mattress, but with the amount of shows that you do per year, I think that this would be something that you could very easily achieve.

The beauty of your little scheme is that if the Tempurpedic people got wind of what we were doing, they might just give me a mattress to shut me up and stop having these samples sent.

I think that this might be a very successful endeavor.

I'll look into it. I'll ask Boni if she can put something on the website about that one.

What is your relationship with Boni Jergen, the webmaster of your site?

She's one of the fans that you want to have because they put the effort into trying to help out your career. She's a super fan, which we could all use more of in life.

Why is it the unofficial Neil Hamburger site?

I told her, "Go ahead. It can be official." Let's face it, you're not going to see me on a computer any time soon. I can barely put together the little sign that says how much the merchandise is during the shows; I don't think I could put together a website. She had taken some courses at college. She's an older lady, but she went back to college, took these courses, learned how to make these sites, and she said, "Let me make your official site." I said, "You got it." Then my management got wind of this and said, "No, if she's going to be doing this officially, she's got to pay us some sort of fee for that." Of course, she didn't have the money. She's got these dogs that eat up a lot of her money and medical problems. I asked them as a favor to me if she could just have the title because it would mean so much to her, but they said no. It's just not right.

how much the merchandise is during the shows; I don't think I could put together a website. She had taken some courses at college. She's an older lady, but she went back to college, took these courses, learned how to make these sites, and she said, "Let me make your official site." I said, "You got it." Then my management got wind of this and said, "No, if she's going to be doing this officially, she's got to pay us some sort of fee for that." Of course, she didn't have the money. She's got these dogs that eat up a lot of her money and medical problems. I asked them as a favor to me if she could just have the title because it would mean so much to her, but they said no. It's just not right.

I saw that there was a Neil Hamburger convention called Neilcon.

Yes, that was a big event for me. That was last year.

Will this be an annual event?

If there's interest. We would have it annually if people would like to come out to something like that again. We had tables of merchandise: soap, signed albums, posters, knickknacks, do-dads, and Neil Hamburger baseball caps. We had an impersonator's contest. People could get up and do their best. We had Neil Hamburger trivia. The grand prize was a twenty-five pound bag of dog food. We had some films that we showed. It was the world premiere of a film we made in Mobile, Alabama. It showed the behind the scenes of the life of Neil Hamburger. There were some bands that played. The Poon Tang Wranglers from San Francisco came out. And then, of course, we had Neil Hamburger himself. I did a very short set at the end of the evening for the throngs of fans that came out.

I also read that there's a Neil Hamburger imposter on Myspace.

Yeah, that's something I just became aware of. A girl in Sydney, Australia came up to me and said, "Hi, I'm so and so and such and such. I think we've met on the Internet. I'm on your Myspace page." It turns out someone has set up a Myspace page using my name and is pretending to be me. My management and Boni have had a look at it. She said it's nice because people are going on there and congratulating me on a job well done. Of course, I'm not reading these comments and have nothing to do with it, so it's a little discouraging. It says that I'm thirty-five and live in Beverly Hills on there, which is not true. They're spreading a lot of disinformation and I don't know why, but I guess it's one of the things that you have to deal with if you're marginally successful.

It says that you like Mad TV.

I've never seen that program. I don't know where they come up with this stuff.

You've performed with many musical artists, one of which was Mr. Bungle. Do you maintain a relationship with Mike Patton or Trey Spruance?

I know all of those guys. Mike has a new group, because the old Mr. Bungle, that went away. They're not doing those songs anymore, but he has some new songs. I've played with these groups. I did a show at the Troubadour, in Hollywood. Mike has a new musical group. They're different, but lots of fun. They're called Fantômas. Tomahawk is another group he has. The guy has a lot of music in his soul. I've done shows with both those groups. The name changes and the music changes, but the people do stick around and will hopefully have me on more bills in the future. That would really help.

Do you have any amusing stories about opening for Mr. Bungle?

I did some shows for them in Australia. There was a show in Brisbane, the last show of the tour. Some of the fans are, unfortunately, very young. They're trying to impress each other and they're very insecure because they're young. So they'll come out to the Mr. Bungle concert and they'll throw something at the opening act, Neil Hamburger. It was getting pretty bad, but I was getting good at dodging these items. We had everything from bottles of water to beer bottles, shoes, socks, rocks, and coins. The Australian fifty-cent coin is about the size of a hubcap over here. All this stuff would come thrown at me and it was a little bit intimidating. One day, Mike and Trey said that they wanted to see what it's like to be me onstage with all of this stuff coming my way. So they went and hid behind some instruments. There were two thousand people a night at these shows. Nobody knew they were there because the lights weren't on them. I got so good at dodging these objects, that I would move out of the way and the objects would hit these two guys. And they ended up covered in drinks, broken glass, hit with coins, the whole thing, and people never knew that their targets were Mr. Bungle themselves. That was quite an eye opener for those guys.

How did you meet Trey Spruance?

He had been one of these guys that had been at some of the shows and had asked me to do some stuff. He has a way with the tape recording, with the microphones, and music. When I was going to make my first record, Looking for Laughs, he volunteered to engineer and produce the record. He did a great job of documenting those early days when I was young and full of dreams.

Tell me about your role in the film The Pick of Destiny.

I thought, when I was offered the role that I would be playing one of these historical characters. John Wilkes Booth or something like that, so I did a lot of research. But then I got the script, I saw that I was playing myself, Neil Hamburger. So it was very easy to act out that part because that is a part that I'm very familiar with. Essentially, you'll see me onstage doing what I do best, which is telling jokes. It is a real feather in my cap. I'm very excited.

What other projects are you currently involved in?

We've got a new DVD that we're doing. It was shot in Sydney with multiple cameras and it's all fresh material. It's got all of this archival footage, TV footage, and shows I've done such as the one Olympic Stadium. There were fifty thousand people there who were very cold in terms of their response to me. It was very negative. The chanting of, "We hate you," and that type of thing. That could be a real hit if Geraldo or Oprah get behind it.

I read something about an autobiography that you had written.

We had worked on something like that, but it fell apart because we couldn't come up with an ending. They want to see people die and publish it then and I was unwilling to write that chapter.

What sort of projects are you contemplating?

We got a lot more shows planned, that's for sure. We'd like to do a movie at some point. The thing I'm really hoping will take off is some sort of retirement because I'm very tired.

Do you plan on coming to the East Coast in the future?

I would say, possibly, September of this year.

Have you thought of using a throat lozenge before going onstage?

I've used a few of those, but a lot of them have that saccharine we were talking about earlier and that stuff will put you out of your mind. You can't be out of your mind when you're doing a show. You need to be very sober and mentally stable.

Do you have a pre-show ritual?

You have to wipe the tears away with a handkerchief because that's not something that the audience needs to know about.

Do you enjoy being an adult?

As a child you're subject to the beatings, some of the counselors at school can be kind of weird, and you can't get into some of these clubs to do comedy as a child.

Do you partake in any shenanigans when out and about?

Things get pretty crazy, yeah. I know, when I toured with Mr. Bungle, for instance, we had the microwave popcorn. Things can get pretty wild.

Do you have a special message to leave the readers with?

I would really hope that they're not going to read this interview and think, "This doesn't sound like something I'd be interested in. I'll go see something else." I hope they read this interview and at least give me a chance because I've worked very hard to keep going when nobody cared. It would be nice if they bought my latest album or came to a show.

Visit Americasfunnyman.com/, the Internet's number one source of all things Neil Hamburger.

August 2007
By Ben Kharakh
https://web.archive.org/web/20071013140029/benkharakh.com/neil_hamburger4

Neil Hamburger is the reigning king of anti-humor, a title that's earned him plenty of fans, twice as many enemies, and not nearly as much money. When he takes the stage, which he does more than 300 times a year, he dons the same outfit he's worn every night for over a decade: a shabby tuxedo. He sweats profusely and clears his throat constantly, wrestling with a ball of phlegm that might be older than his suit. "Why does KFC sell its chicken in a bucket? So you have somewhere to throw up after you eat it." Audience members groan, boo and curse his name. But this isn't some downtown open mic or a tiny theater -- it's Madison Square Garden and Hamburger is opening for Tenacious D on its arena-sized tour. In fact, it's not the first time he's played crowds this big. He's performed at massive outdoor music festivals around the world, and opened for the likes of Mr. Bungle. Usually, though, he plays smaller venues, and on Sun., Sept. 2, he's coming to Gooski's.

How are you?
Doing well. Never better.

Really?
Well, in that I'm talking to you, which is always a treat.

Thank you. But how have things been going for you lately?
Oh boy. You haven't been reading your Internet, have you?

Why? What have I missed?
Oh, just a series of disastrous shows. I just did some shows in the Midwest and some of them were quite controversial. You get people coming to shows with sour faces, and that's always controversial. A lot of complaints. Some of the newer jokes weren't top quality. People complained about the T-shirts we had manufactured- that they didn't come in every size. Just a general malaise from some of the people.

Someone complained that there was a fruit fly in their drink and he showed me his drink. This was in Iowa City, for the record. There was a fruit fly that had landed in it and another guy showed me his drink and there was a baby cockroach in it. I'm not making it up. This is what's actually happening on the road and it's not being reported. It's that sort of thing that gets in the way of trying to do a good job, which is what I'm trying to do when I'm out there on the road playing places like Sioux Falls and Carterville.

What are you supposed to do about the drinks?
They somehow blame the performer for that. The shows are advertised as being a Neil Hamburger show. Tickets are eight dollars and people come out with the expectation that the show will live up to the general quality of a Neil Hamburger show. That quality does not include being poisoned by insects. Nowhere on the ticket does it say anything about having to agree to accept the possibility of insects in your drinks. That's where these people come from and then they get the lawyers involved and that whole mess. We're just worried that I might be drawn into some sort of lawsuit.

Since you're responsible for the whole show, what else do you have to do other than just tell your jokes?
I thought it was just to entertain people and make their fool heads fall right off with laughter. Apparently not. Now you've got people suing, I hesitate to call them, musicians. These punk rockers are being sued because someone chips their teeth or breaks their necks as they pile up on each other during these songs. These kids jump off the stage, wired on God knows what. They climb onto the stage, jump off onto each other's heads, snap the neck, chip the tooth, break the skull, the arm, and the whole thing. Then you're going to sue the musician? With me, you don't get as much breaking of teeth and that sort of thing, so then they need to look for other inconveniences to sue me over and they find this insect thing. I saw the insects and I do believe they were real, but you don't know if these things were placed there by somebody. Then there's cases like this guy suing Reeses' Peanut Butter Cups because he found the tip of a condom in his peanut butter cup.

I haven't heard about that.
It's all over the news. You have to be tuned into world events if you're going to be a journalist.

Have you ever had an experience like that?
I got a Hershey's Bar years ago and I found amphetamines inside of it. Little pills. I didn't know what sort of pills they were, but all of the pills have numbers on them and if you go on the web you can do a search by pill and number and that's what it came up with. This was given to me by a fan at a show, so It's very likely that this candy was tampered with.

What other things have fans given you?
There was a girl who was trying to give me herpes. She had a sore on her mouth and she said, "Oh, Neil, we love you're comedy here," and she keeps hugging me and wanting to take photos. And this whole time she's trying to rub herpetic sore on my face. People who want your photo taken usually want a handshake, but this women kept nuzzling her face toward mine and the closer she gets the more you see the leakage on this sore. That's communicable. It's not necessarily a sexual sort of disease. It could be from something as innocent as any sort of human contact. That's the sort of gifts I get.

What else do you get?
There's a guy in Texas, I believe in Fortworth, and he has built a life sized Neal Hamburger robot. He works in the movie industry making horror monsters. It's sort of like a mannequin, but it can move and it's got a tuxedo and everything. It's six feet tall and he's been saying that he wants to present it to one of the shows. So if you come out to the Dallas, Fortworth area, you can see this thing in person.

Does this robotic Neal Hamburger also tell jokes?
That was the hold up. I think it was completed a while back and that he's now working with some technicians, trying to get a voice chip installed, and that's a more difficult thing. That's where you start running into the big dollars and this guy's doing it strictly on a shoestring budget out of love. I also believe he's furthering his own skills. It certainly looks good on your resume.

Have you seen or met with the robotic Neal Hamburger?
I've seen pictures of it, but they were from before it had the hair, so had a bald look. It had glasses, but no hair. It's like looking into my future.

How much like you did it look?
I don't have that Telly Savalas sort of look. The facial features were there, though, it was sad.

If you had this Neal Bot with you as you traveled around the county, then the fans that get overzealous can take their excitement out on the robot and you can avoid any herpetic scares and such.
That's not a bad idea. I'm very tired. So far, we're set to beat my record of most shows done by a comedian from the previous years. So far, we're halfway through the year and we're already 71 shows above one show per day. We're on pace for something here and that'll wear you out. And then you have these tortillas. We did a show out in Sioux Falls , North Dakota and we had Mexican food there with sugary tasting salsa. That sort of thing will really wear you out. So having a robot that you can send out on the road would really be a boon for most entertainers.

Do you think, if possible, that you could have this guy make you an army of robotic Neil Hamburgers that would perform all over the world for you.
No, that's like what The Platters or The Drifters do. You look online and say, "I'd like to see the platters. Where are they playing?" Well, they're playing tonight in New Jersey, and they're playing tonight in Texas, South Carolina, and San Diago because they've franchised their name. The original Platters died 50 years ago. These guys are a bunch of kids who dress the part. They kind of look the part. A few of them are white, which doesn't look like The Platters to me. They send this thing out on the road and they're playing The Flying Jake Truck Stop up on The Grape Vine Highway. What happens then is that you debase the whole thing. People say, "Neil Hamburger is coming to my town!" but, so what? He's simultaneously appearing at five other towns. That's nothing. I may as well watch TV.

What I would do is haul the robot out onstage to do the act while I man the merchandise table, sign CDs, and sell souvenir trinkets while the robot does the joke telling himself. I think that would be much less stressful for me, if the robot could do a good job, which remains to be seen.

You'd rather have the robot tell the jokes for you?
Well, people want to have their photos taken or a personal signature and I don't know how personal it would be to have a robot sign your albums. You write a letter to the president saying, "What you're doing is just absolutely terrible, sincerely yours." He'll write back a letter to you saying, "Dear Constituent, I'm not so happy with what you're doing either. Sincerely, George W. Bush." You get this letter back and think you've got a letter to frame, but all the other letters that come back from this guy are signed exactly the same because he literally has a robot that holds the ball point pen and makes these signatures, thus rendering the signatures absolutely worthless. Now, these presidents have been doing this since John F. Kennedy. That's when the autopen was first invented, which is a robot. Now, you can't do that to people because it really tears them up and breaks their hearts.

In my case, I've appeared in Tenacious D and The Pick of Destiny, they want to have their picture taken with someone who's appeared in a movie. People don't often meet folks who have appeared in films. I met a guy at one of my shows who appeared in a commercial for Lays Potato Chips, so if I ask that guy to sign my potato chip bag and he says, "No, I'm going to turn that over to my robot," I'd think much less of him and perhaps not even have bought the Lays Potato Chips.

Although not quite a robot, are you against the automated tellers at super markets?
Yeah, for a lot of older men most of the sex that they obtain at this point is from picking up these cashiers. A lot of times they're insecure teenage girls. Of course, I don't have the time or charisma to do that, but I'm just saying that if you replace these teenage girls with these robots that you're basically letting loose a lot of older men who are sexually unsatisfied, which, of course, will lead to an increase in pornography sales, shoplifting of pornography, and perhaps even rape and sexual assault. So they need to consider this sort of stuff when they come up with these ideas, who this affects, and how.

What do you see as other technologic advances that aren't really benefiting human kind? I thought that all this automation was great. I never even thought about all of these randy, older gentlemen committing all these crimes.
I know, because some of these older gentlemen come to my shows and they complain about it afterward. A lot of the technology is, let's face it, not up to speed. A lot of these new movies don't use animators and have a computer that does everything. Have you seen any of those?

Like Pixar?
Maybe. I haven't seen that one. I'll tell you what I did see: The Fantastic Four. That was anything but fantastic. Now, when you watch The Flintstones, those guys knew how to draw. They'd get a pen out and a piece of paper and would draw Fred, Barney, Dino, and the whole gang. That was really funny stuff. Now you have these things that have a metallic sort of look and there's monsters and it's really unpleasant on every level. That is one place where I think the improvement is anything but.

You've mentioned in the past that you put a lot of hard work into comedy but that it doesn't really pay off. What is it that keeps you going?
You've asked me that already. Couldn't you just re-use parts of the previous interviews?

I wanted to know if it's changed for you since it's been a while since I've asked. I know you need the money, but what else?
Well, let's face it- I'm getting super super old and worn out. Have you ever gone to the store and bought a new washcloth for the bathroom? It's so wonderful and you use it to dry your face and that sort of thing after you've shaved. I don't know if you're Muslim, but if you're not and you do shave then you know what I'm taking about. If you are, I'm sorry and I apologize. But, even if you're a Muslim and didn't shave you'd still use a washcloth after you washed your hands. Now, after you've used a washcloth for many washes they start to get worn out

August 2007
By Ben Kharakh
https://web.archive.org/web/20071013140029/benkharakh.com/neil_hamburger4

washcloth for the bathroom? It's so wonderful and you use it to dry your face and that sort of thing after you've shaved. I don't know if you're Muslim, but if you're not and you do shave then you know what I'm taking about. If you are, I'm sorry and I apologize. But, even if you're a Muslim and didn't shave you'd still use a washcloth after you washed your hands. Now, after you've used a washcloth for many washes they start to get worn out and before you know it you put out other washcloths when you have company over and put these in the back drawer. Then you're using it to wipe up dog spills on the floor if you have a pet. And then you're using it strictly as an oil rag when you change your oil and your washcloth is torn, the threads are coming out, it's discolored, and it's just worn out and tired. That, essentially, is what's happened to me. If you listen to some of my older albums, you'll hear a spark, a real spirit that's not there anymore. Of course, my voice is wearing out and that will happen if you talk as often as I do. When I'm not onstage telling jokes, which can be for up to two hours a night, I'm giving interviews with journalists such as yourself, although usually not with as good of questions as yours. And, of course talking to myself during the day, with all the self criticisms, because you can't be alone. You need to talk to somebody, even if it's just yourself. You go crazy if it's just the thoughts in your brain.

You could talk to God.
I was doing a lot of that, but it was just not panning out. And then he brought all that 9/11 garbage onto us and so many children are diagnosed with cancer. That's supposed to be part of his plan? Well, that's not a plan that I'm going to sign up with, you know what I'm saying? There are car accidents, airline disasters, aids, famine, and that sort of thing. If this is what this God is coming up with, it's time we get someone new in there because it's really a disheartening string of events. Asking the guy who created these typhoons, food poisonings, and diseases for help is obviously not going to pan out.

Were you ever religious?
I was very deeply religious for a short time when I was trying to get my career going. I thought that that might help. It takes its toll on you when you've seen some of the things that I've seen out there on the road. It's hard to keep the faith. Are faith oriented, Ben?

Not particularly, but I am interested in the subject.
Are you a pastor at a local church?

I am not.
Do you own the holy bible?

I do own a copy.
Was it stolen from a hotel? A lot of those have been defaced. I opened up one the other day just out of pure boredom and someone had cut out from one of the gay magazines a picture of a man with a huge erection and inserted that into this particular copy of the bible. So you do have to watch out, because that was not in the original copy of the bible. This was strictly a prankster. Probably a 10-year-old kid trying to ruin someone's experience reading the bible.

What exactly ended your religious period?
Let's face it: it's the filth talk and the rubbish mouth tha people want to hear. They don't want my sermons abou trying to make the world a better place. They want to hear something about Paris Hilton stepping on someone's severed penis and flattening it out or whatever you're telling them about. There's just no reason to keep the faith. And then you hear some of these celebrities thanking God when they win their awards, but then you look at the things that they're winning for and you're thinking, "Well, this Eric Clapton album must have been the answer to his prayers." But the album is horrible and I don't want to be involved with something like that. If that's how God answers prayers and rewards people, with albums that are clearly unpleasant to all, then that's not something you want to get tangled up in. It's something to run from.

Are you in anyway spiritual, perhaps you practice meditation or believe in reincarnation?
I do believe in reincarnation because night after night, it's the same. I was reincarnated as another to nights ago. The whole thing is a giant loop that you cannot break out of and I have tried. I do believe I'll be reincarnated again after death, as another entertainer forced to perform 491 shows per year, which is what we're on pace to do this year thanks to some of the triple-headers. Afternoon shows.

How have you tried to break that loop?
I've often thought that another career might be more beneficial.

Oh, I thought that you had attempted suicide.

Well, I have attempted suicide a few times, most recently when I jumped off a pile of bad reviews for my latest album. At this point, we're trying to stick with a life program and keep this thing going. Honestly, the worst thing that can happen is to die a pauper in an unmarked grave and that's what I'm looking at if I can't get out of this financial hole. My dream is to have one of these fancy funerals where you've got a band playing- I mean an orchestra, not one of these rock and roll bands. You've got people coming out and offering their testimonials. Really something exciting and not just being dumped out of a tractor into a hole on the outskirts of town. It would be a wrong time for a suicide.

Is a fancy funeral a goal that you're working toward?
It's not that I want a funeral. In fact, I'm not at all interested in that scene. What I'm interested in is that if I did have a fancy funeral it would be proof that my career was a success. Let me put it this way: Bob Hope was not dumped into the city dump here in LA. Dig through the landfills of New Jersey and you're not going to find the body of Frank Sinatra. These guys were treated right and that's because their careers were so successful. Now, if you dig through the landfills you might find the girl from Different Strokes. She was killed by drug abuse and sexuality. You might find her body in a landfill and that's a hell of a way to end a great career because, after all, she was so wonderful.

What would your ideal funeral be like?
A screening of my full length movie, which had been completed by my death, followed by reminiscences from other comedians saying that they'd only dream of having the sort of success that I achieved, and then, finally, the band strikes up, the coffin is brought up, and when they lift the lid I pop out and say, "Folks, I'm still alive and I'm not going anywhere!" That's the ideal funeral. Mostly, when they have these funerals, people don't pop out. They get buried and that's the end of them. That's not great. I don't wish that on anyone.

Not even on Carrot Top?
What I'd really like is for Carrot Top to get into professional baseball. Because of his steroid use, he can beat the Barry Bonds record. They don't test comedians for steroids, so he would be right under the radar.

Have you personally taken any comedy steroids?
No, those are very expensive. Carrot Top is booked nightly at the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas, as anyone who's been unfortunate enough to stay there knows. For me, I could live off the money of one night's booking at the Luxor for years. Carrot Top is getting that money nightly and for a show that's by all accounts very gross. A show that's truly stomach turning.

What is it about the show that's so gross and stomach turning?
The man himself. He's got pubic hairs falling out of his pants and running down his pant leg. Some of these props are obscene. He brings out this trunk of props and they're just obscene, phallic type props that could easily go where the sun doesn't shine. Also, the look on his face- it's bloated and not looking too healthy because of the steroids. His face is twice the size, his Carrot Top hair is twice as disgusting, twice as bright, and the show's twice as bad. Please, folks, if you're out there and you're reading this, and I don't know that you will be because I don't think this part will be transcribed, but if you are please take the money you'd spend on Carrot Top and give 1/25th of it to your son, another 1/25th of it to your daughter, another 25th of it to your mother, another 25th of it to your father, your grandfather, your grandmother, your priest or Rabbi, your mailman. Just divide this thing up equally amongst all the people who are important in your life and then take what's left over and you'll still have enough money to see Neil Hamburger, live in your town. My tickets are cheaper than the carrot top tickets by a factor of 25. That's why I make this request and we think it's the right choice.

Now, we'd skimmed over your suicide attempt, but I think it's something that the readers would be interested in, if you're comfortable talking about it.
Well, the bad reviews were coming in for my album Great Moments at Di Presa's Pizza House, which is the most recent album. We were collecting these reviews and I didn't have the chance to read them, but as they were coming in we'd put them in a pile. The pile got bigger and bigger and then one day when I was staying at the Super 8 Motel at Moorhead, Minnesota. We dragged all of these reviews in from the trunk of the car. I was feeling pretty down already because I had received word that my daughter was seen laughing her head off at a Dane Cook show and she hasn't spoken to me in two years. Last time I'd played her town, she didn't even come to my show, but she goes to see Dane Cook. That was depressing and I was already heading down. Then there was a new lawsuit, if you can believe that.

What was that for?
This was some pirated software that was being used in the car I'd rented. You know when it's hot and you want to turn the air-conditioning on, open the windows, or even look at the speedometer to see how fast you're going on your digital display? That's all done by a computer, unless you're in an old 57 Chevy. It turned out that in the car I rented, the software that was doing all that was pirated. I didn't know that. We had this car rented for two months. The next thing I know, I'm being named in this lawsuit for having used this pirated software. Insane. It was an insane lawsuit that was one of the very few that I actually won. The suit was eventually dismissed. But, at that time, I was dealing with that lawsuit and a lawsuit from a Motel 6 in Madison, Wisconsin.

What was that about?
You know the box spring on a mattress? They claimed that I had broken the box spring. One of the nails was loose and this whole thing was not in good condition. What I had done after that show because of the bad weather was take all my merchandise from the trunk of my car and pile it on the bed. I guess the weight of all this stuff caused a leg of the bed to break or for the wood to split. I think it was rotten ahead of time. That whole place was rotten! You wouldn't believe how dirty the bathrooms were. When you check into a motel room, the first thing you do shouldn't be get grabbing a toilette brush and cleaning the facilities. You shouldn't have to use the coffee maker to boil water to pour all over the sink and sink top so that you can lay your tooth brush down without it getting covered in bugs.

So, we had all of these lawsuits going on and I bring these reviews into the motel in Moorhead and start reading them. They were horrible. Just spiteful, negative, and they did not like the record at all. I just piled the reviews up and they made quite a pile. I jumped off and I thought, "At the very least this is going to break every bone in my body and keep me off the road for a while, but I guess my shoes are in better condition than I thought or the carpeting there is soft or something because all I ended up with was a sprained ankle.

Did you take that as a sign to keep going?
Yeah, it's definitely to keep going. Not as much as a message as some of the legal papers I get in the mail, but it certainly gives you hope.

What are these legal papers? What do they tell you to do?
We're talking about huge amounts of money that are owed to these management companies. They're sending out bills for the work they're doing and bills for the work they have done, which I'm still paying off, plus the interest for this whole mess. It's 24% per year, which is hard to keep up with.

That seems a little high.
Yeah, but that's what a lot of the credit cards I have do, so I think it's an industry standard. If you know of any loan guys or people who loan out money, please get in touch. The only problem is that I don't have a lot of money.

You've got to be careful with these organizations that give out loans but don't require collateral. They could be mixed up with some of these Mafioso types and if you reach out to them and don't pay them back, they might break some of your thumbs.
That's the problem I ran into already because those types are mixed up with some of the management that I've used. That's the mess we're already in.

Have you witnessed them commit any illegal activity?
I can't talk about that in the interview, but I will say this much: these guys have their fingers in some these Indian casinos, which has helped me get some of these bookings, but I've lost some of the bookings too when the shows didn't meet the high standards of these degenerate gamblers that come to the shows and then complain. Can you imagine that? You come to a free comedy show at a casino and then you have the nerve to complain even though you have made a mess of your life by drinking and gambling. How dare you?

They sound like ungrateful pukes to me.
Yep.

If you declared bankruptcy and tried to start a new career, what would you do?
I could probably go back to what I used to do, which is working in the fast food industry. I'm also very interested in pest control. I stay at a lot of hotels and you see a lot of spiders, centipedes, bedbugs, roaches, and even ants. I know the highway system of this country very well because I'm touring all the time, so all I'd need to do is get some sort of vehicle to carry all of these pesticides, fly swatters, and whatever else it takes, go to these hotels that I've stayed in the past, and say, "Look, I know you have a problem and I'm here to be the solution." You charge $5 to pest proof each room and that's a good value. I think I could make a lot more money doing that than telling these jokes.

What are some tips that you can offer to take care of these bug problems?
You've got to get poison. You can't just do it by slapping them out of the air with your hands. You need to spray your mattress with Raid or Lysol's disinfectant. You've got to wash the sheets. You can't just let that go forever. If you have food, don't leave it on the floor. Do your dishes, that sort of thing. Stay away from refurbished mattresses. They just take mattresses right off the street and put a new cover over them and sell them as refurbished. Believe me, you're going to be scratching your arms, legs, and all your other limbs as the bed bugs burrow into you the next morning.

Have you seen these television specials where reporters go into a hotel room with a black light and discover all of these horrific stains?
Yeah, we bought one of those black lights ourselves after the special aired and I can tell you that it's all true. You'll see some really disgusting things if you buy a black light. Ticks turn up well under a black light as well. Normally they camouflage themselves. The black light reveals the truth. I wish they'd hold up a black light to Carrot Top or Dane Cook. It'd reveal the truth about those assholes. It's going too far with them.

What would the black light of truth reveal about Neil Hamburger?
That he has been the hardest working comedian there ever was. That he has the rare gift to bring joy where there is none and take a bunch of depressed, miserable, horrible people who are feeling awful and sorry for themselves sitting in a diseased, disgusting nightclub watching one horrible group after another perform. Then old Neil comes up there and cheers them up because we're all heading to an early grave, I'll tell you. There's nothing better than someone who is this cheerful and really make you happy again. And that's what people need to realize. Not like these Dane Cooks who are so consumed with hate, stupidity, and jealousy that they can't put on a good show.

I came up with a slogan you could use for your pest control business. "You'll catch more flies with Hamburger than with vinegar."
I like that. We should go into business together. You can write the slogans and finance the whole thing and I will kill the centipedes and do what I can to make these room clean. I'll vacuum. That's the first step because half the bugs are in the carpet. And then you have to throw out the vacuum bag and get another one, which is expensive. A dollar a bag.

So, the weight staff at these hotels and motels isn't really up to snuff?
No, because they're not looking for bugs. They're usually looking through your stuff and trying to steal your money. They're not too interested in centipedes.

Have you ever caught someone looking through your things?
No, but things have gone missing. Not large amounts of cash, but coins. When I enter into a room, I tend to empty my pockets onto the dresser and sometimes you come back and the coins are gone.

Have you ever confronted any of the staff about this?
No, because then I'd get blackballed. You don't want to be blackballed because then you'd never be able to stay at that chain again, although I do stay at a lot of the independent fly by night fleabag sort of places. Let's face it: I make a lot of use of hotel rooms because of the schedule that I keep. We stay at a hotel room every third night, so to be blackballed by one of these chains would be a nightmare.

Tell me about your time in the fast food industry?
It's bad food, I'll tell you that. It's not healthy. You'll do much better eating fruit cocktails, canned peas, or maybe making pancakes if you can get a hold of some cheap flour. This stuff that they're serving in these places, with their oil, salt, grease, worms, and bugs, is really nothing I'd recommend to your readers, assuming that you have any readers, which you may not because you've done so many interviews with me. You might have killed them all off.

This interview is actually going to three different publications.
Is one of them insect control weekly?

No.
Alright.

So,did you work as a manager or were you more hands on, preparing burgers and that sort of deal?
This was when I was very young, before I was doing comedy. I was very low on the totem pole. I was there for about a year and then I was fired. They said that my work was of poor quality.

Did you work any other jobs?
Just that one and the job I have of making people laugh.

You've been performing for a long time. Have you noticed any differences in the sort of people that attend your shows?
I used to do pizza parlors and those crowds would yawn a lot or talk to each other during the show because they were there mainly for the discounted pizza. These pizza shows are usually in conjunction with an off night, so they'll have a Monday night special like buy an extra large for the price of a large plus free live comedy. Those guys were pretty disinterested. Now the crowds are these young rock and roll type people and they're very excitable. Sometimes too excitable because they holler out punch lines and make nuisances of themselves.

Are the crowds getting fatter?
Yeah, we started selling the extra extra large shirts this year due to requests and the smalls have been getting a lot less. There are certain regions where you're better off ordering a lot more extra extra large shirts while in cities like your New Yorks, Bostons, and San Franciscos you get a lot more of these emaciated young men who are looking for something smaller than a small. They're like a feather. They'll blow away in the wind.

You've mentioned that your fans like to speak to you after a show. Do they ever use you as a therapist?
I would say yes. We had a young woman that confessed to an extra-marital affair after a show. We had another man who confessed a disgraceful blotch on his record during his time in the military. He wouldn't say exactly what it was, but he received a dishonorable discharge. We had a young man who admitted that he had plagiarized my act for his own terrible act and we had a young lady who admitted that she didn't find the show at all funny or entertaining. So, people do confess the most horrific things from time to time at the conclusion of the show.

Who was this young gentleman who stole from your act?
Some sort of asshole. Some prick. Prick prick prick who started his own comedy career who said, "I love your jokes so much that, in fact, I've been doing them in my own act," and I said, "Listen, you son of a bitch, how dare you say that to me? You're as bad as these cock suckers who come up to me and say, 'Neil, I love your albums. In fact, I downloaded all of them illegally just last night.'" Some of these people just don't know how to be pleasant to be around."

You've performed in New York a few times. What has your experience been like performing in NYC?
Well, they have their various ways of cheating you. Is that what you're looking for? Is this a muck-raking magazine?

It's a comedy website, but if there's some muck-

August 2007
By Ben Kharakh
https://web.archive.org/web/20071013140029/benkharakh.com/neil_hamburger4

raking to be done I'm certain the readers would be glad to hear about it.
We've a had people sneak in through the back door, robbing us of income. But, I'll tell you what, we've always had a good crowd in New York whether it's been in little clubs such as Pianos or the Madison Square Gardens, the pinnacle of all New York comedy clubs. People there love to laugh. It's almost like they have so many problems that the clubs are therapeutic.

Do you find that the more problems someone has the heartier their laughs?
No, because at Madison Square Garden they had a lot of problems but they weren't laughing. Some of the kids that are in these independent rock and roll bands who come out to my shows have severe emotional disorders and yet they find the time to laugh their heads off and that's why I will always find time to come out to New York and why it will never be left off the schedule. That's insane for you to suggest that we do that. We've played in Sioux Falls and we'll play in Sioux Falls next year and we played in New York and we'll play in New York next year. And I'll tell you what, they say that if you can make it here you can make it anywhere and that is not true. It's such an easier crowd in New York than in Sioux Falls.

Who laughs the hardest?
Fat guys tend to laugh pretty hard. Those are my heroes. Some of the people who are alcoholics or have a chemical imbalance or mental issues. And then there's the giggling girls. You've got to love the giggling girls because they can light up a room. You see these pretty young girls giggling and although they're not the hearty laughs of a fat man they're better because they're sweet giggles of someone whose face really lights up the whole room.

You mentioned Sioux Falls a few times. Why is that?
We did a show there last week and it's still fresh in my mind. We pulled up in front of the venue and it looked like the sort of place Jimmy Buffet would own. There was a huge banner up on the front door that said, in giant letters, "Welcome Bikers!"

How did you perform in front of the bikers?
They didn't come, but it was pretty intimidating because I didn't know what was going to happen. You never know what bikers will do. There's Sturges, which gets taken over by bikers and they get drunk and vomit on each other and the women get pictures of the vomit splatters tattooed on their breasts. It's a whole scene.

What's the most unusual crowd you've ever performed in front of?
You don't know who's really unusual until you look into their hearts and we've had a few people who had some pretty sick things in theirs. We've had people who were from supporters of genocide. That would be the most unusual audience I've performed for. Murderers, triple murders, quadruple murders, people who are twins but have sex with one another despite their blood relation, people who enjoy sex with bowel movements, people who are 19/20 year old Yo La Tengo fans and enjoy having sex with their grandmothers who are in their 90s. Those are the weirdest and most unusual audiences I've had, but you'll never know because they keep their secrets to themselves.

Then how do you find out these secrets?
You never do. You just find out that they're out there.

What percentage of your crowd, then, would you say is made up of sex perverts?
I'd have to say it's high. I've performed for millions of people and there are millions of sex perverts, so you could easily see how quite a few of them would be at the shows.

Since you've performed so many times in New York, have you ever been the victim of any sort of mugging?
I have not. I've had people come up onstage and demand money-homeless guys who wandered into the venue. But since we've been doing these bigger shows, like Madison Square Garden, there's less of a chance of being mugged. If anything, I'm more likely to be refused entry myself because there are ten or twenty check points before you get to the stage. I don't think the muggers could get on that stage. Even in smaller clubs like Pianos no one can mug you because they're packed in so tight that no one can move. You're like sardines. If someone was to draw their fist back to punch you, they'd be unable because their arm is pinned into place by the 10,000 other people jammed into the room.

How about when wandering the streets?
Like when I'm sitting on my cot or sleeping in the alley behind the venue?

Yes.
No, I haven't been mugged at that point, although we did have a man who urinated behind a trashcan that I was set up behind The guy was urinating onto the wall, so that was splattering all over my feet and blanket. I don't think he knew I was there, so I don't take that as a personal attack by the people of New York but rather an unfortunate coincidence.

Have you ever been attacked?
Are you trying to promote this? Who's reading this? The Son of Sam? Is this being given out in prisons?

I'm not trying to encourage anything.
These are the sort of questions that got Mark David Chapman where he was. It sounds like you're trying to incite a riot or get me to explain how best to attack me. It's like asking the guy who heads the national security administration about what they did to foil attempts to sneak bombs onto a plane, what some things are that they don't anticipate, and what the glitches in their security are. That's what it sounds like you're doing and I resent it because it puts myself and others in danger.

I apologize. But it makes me wonder, if that Robotic Neil Hamburger goes bad and tried to attack you, how could you take it down?
I think if you take the batteries out the thing is dead.

Not at all like the real Neil Hamburger.
I think my batteries were taken out a long time ago, but I've got some sort of reserve power apparently because the shows keep going on.

I think that'll do it for this session.
What a sad note to end on.

Well, we can leave it on a more cheerful note. Your interviews do tend to highlight the misfortunes of Neil Hamburger, but what have been some of your victories?
Well, the numerous interviews with you. How many have you done with Carrot Top?

None.
How about Dane Cook?

One, but it was through email.
So you don't even know if he answered it. It could have been anyone. How about Mussolini?

None.
Who else have you interviewed this many times?

Your top competition are Andrew WK and Dana Gould.
I've heard the name and, of course, WK is a real sweetheart, I'm told.

He is. He's very nice and a big fan of yours.
I've heard that he was a comedian himself in his own way. I've also heard that he's afraid of ghosts and hauntings. Ask him about that next time you speak with him.

I haven't heard anything about that.
Well, I stayed in a hotel in Winnipeg, Manitoba a couple of weeks ago. Apparently, Mr. WK had also stayed at that hotel and had left because of the ghosts. He saw the spirits and could not sleep because they were haunting him. He checked out and stayed at another hotel. When he checked into the other hotel, they asked him why and he said, "Well, it's because I had to get away from these ghosts," and they told him that that hotel was known to be haunted. He went on the Internet and found a whole website about the ghosts and spooks at this hotel.

Have you had any experiences with ghosts yourself?
The ghosts left me alone. They were probably bigger fans of his than mine. But when I checked in they told me, "This hotel is haunted. We've had other famous names stay here, but they left. Let's see if you can stay the night." But I was happy just to stay at this hotel and not sleep on the street.

Did you encounter anything supernatural that night?
I felt like I couldn't breath. Like the ghost was sitting on my chest, but that could be anything. It happens lot, actually. I don't dispute Mr. WK's account. That hotel could certainly be haunted. There's a lot of evidence of this. It's called The Marlboro hotel in Winnipeg.

Have you ever had any encounters with ghosts?
Only when I look in the mirror.

Do you believe in the supernatural, or perhaps Big Foot or UFOs?
I believe in Big Foot for sure. That is very real and you do have to watch out for that guy. The UFOs I'm not so sold on.

You're not a conspiracy theorist, then?
I've got a lot of my own problems. I don't need to take on everyone else's too. I believe there's a conspiracy to keep my career stunted, but I don't believe in the conspiracy that the UFOs shot Kennedy or anything like that.

What is this conspiracy to keep Neil Hamburger down?
Look around you. Dane Cook? What's going on there? Carrot Top? I mean, these people are selling out giant venues. People have got to be under some sort of mind control drugs and I don't know what the agenda is there. I don't know why the mind control people want people to go to a Carrot Top show, but apparently they do.

How far does this conspiracy go? We've got Dane Cook and Carrot Top. Who else is involved?
Probably some other comedians. I don't want to implicate people who aren't involved. There's some musicians. Have you heard of The Maroon 5? I would think that they're involved. It makes sense. There's certainly no reason to attend one of their concerts, unless someone's manipulated your brainwaves, which they can do now with remote control. They don't even need to put you in for surgery like they used when they were introducing some of these other substandard entertainers like Pat Boone. They had to operate on people in a hospital to build up that fan base. Now, you're shopping for groceries, there's a guy looking through a one way mirror in the ceiling of a supermarket implanting this Carrot Top seed into your brain. He's not even breaking a sweat. It's as easy as typing in a couple of numbers. When are you going to talk with Carrot Top?

I tend to only interview comedians I've personally seen or enjoy, so I don't think I'll be interviewing Mr. Top.
Have you seen Chairman of the Board, his movie?

I have not. Should I rent it?
I wouldn't go that far, but it would certainly give you lots to ask him about. And that's an interview you could probably sell. Also, you could tell him how much the world hates him and how we wish he would retire because it's just killing hardworking folks such as myself, Neil Hamburger, America's Youngest Comedian, all of us suffering because of poor attendance caused by Carrot Top and these mind implants.

What was that about being America's Youngest Comedian?
That's a tag line we've been using for a while because people like younger comedians.

Is that an attempt to reinvent yourself?
Very much so. People want to see the young, hot shot comedians and I think that's a good phrase to get people into the door. If they think people are going to see America's Youngest Comedian, then they're going to come in. If they think they're going to see America's Comedian with Hair that might work too. It's worked for Carrot Top. I do think America's Youngest Comedian is a great line. Attendance has gone up since we've started using it. Walk outs have been up too, but that doesn't matter once you've been paid.

What are some other ways that you've attempted to re-invent yourself? Have you thought of being Neil Hamburger: America's Dirtiest Comedian, or Neil Hamburger: America's Hardest Working comedian, or Neil Hamburger: America's Blackest Comedian?

from Resistant Harmony Issue 7, November 1995

NEIL HAMBURGER

I first heard NEIL HAMBURGER on the absolutely fantastic **'GREAT PHONE CALLS'** Vinyl LP on the San Francisco based **AMARILLO** label,run by one Mr Gregg Turkington. This one album of which hardly anybody around Oz has seemed to of latched onto is 50 TIMES MORE FUNNIER THAN THE JERKY BOYS ! & has had myself and a bunch of friends in constant fits of pure Laughter whenever that rekkid gets a rotation. Such classics as 'Im in your band' ,'A score to settle' 'Graduate of Yaoo' etc.. are just total phone prank GENIUS....and we're happier than a bunch of pigs in shit to bring you a June 1995 chat with one of the 'stars' of said LP,& a true comic wonder in his own right.....Testes Testes 1,2,3.....ladies & genitals we bring you none other than the crazy cat himself,the waggish,witty,boy of buffoonery....Mr Neeeeeeil Hamburger !!

RH: *So Neil,how was the reaction to your most recent across America tour ??*

NEIL: **Oh,funny you should ask. It was fantastic.People have the funniest way of letting off steam....they laugh. And that's just what they did. I have a lot of memories. It was a lot of fun.**

RH: *Is your surname named after the American 'Hamburger'? or has it been an integral standing in your family for generations ?*

NEIL: **No, 'Hamburger' is just a stage name. My REAL name is.....Cheeseburger. You should have seen me bring the house down with that joke !**

RH: *With such a high profile existence,how does Neil escape from the Public eye ?*

NEIL: **How do i escape the public eye?...how can i FIND the public eye is my question. Quite seriously here,my career has not been as successful as i'd like. So i can pretty much go undetected in public,even on stage sometimes.**

RH: *Was the making of the 'Looking for Laughs' ep a demanding & draining time for you ?*

NEIL: **Well,any time you step onto a stage it is demanding. And knowing that the shows were being recorded for the record,well it upped the ante,shall we say.Yes it was demanding.Yes,it was even draining.I think i gave the performance of my life. (which is too bad,because now i feel all the audiences i perform for in the future are being cheated !)**

RH: *What inspires you to create new material ? Are you constantly amazed at the growing strength of your gags ?*

NEIL: **I'm inspired by the foibles of being human. By current news events,current lingo,the movies,by impotence. But seriously,yes i am amazed at how a certain routine can really 'Take off' and take on a life of it's own.It makes it easier to perform when you know what works and what doesn't work.Performing 365 shows a year,as i sometimes do,you really get the chance to work out any bugs that might hamper a routine.Which means i always keep a bottle of insect repellent alongside my gin & tonic on stage.**

RH: *Does Neil Hamburger enjoy a healthy sex life travelling the comedy circuits of the United States of America ?*

NEIL: **Well,my wife will probably be reading this,so i'd better say 'no'. Actually,having a wife at home is a blessing in disguise,because on the one hand,i can pretend that that's the reason no-one ever goes home with me after the show,and on the other hand,since i tour year-round and never actually spend any time with her,i don't have to worry about getting nagged to empty the trash every day. (she just let's it pile up all year for when i return.Which means she sees the Health Department Inspector more than she sees me.Maybe he's the real father of my children ?**

RH: *Can you give our Australian readers a sampling of some choice moments they can expect to hear on the next leg of the 'Hamburger over Oz' 1995 tour ?*

NEIL: **I'd love to give you some examples of my Ayer's Rock routine that i had worked out (What's the difference between Ayer's Rock and Japan ?....Ayer's Rock is bigger and has more Japanese crawling all over it.) but the tour is probably being cancelled and rescheduled as the man who set it up is in jail right now in New Zealand on some sort of smuggling charges.When i was there in 94' however,i found out that one thing is truly universal.....LAUGHTER !**

RH: *Can you tell us about some of your fellow 'Amarillo' label stable mates & what they're up to & if you yourself have any other releases planned for the coming months ?*

NEIL: **I don't really know much about the other acts on the label.I believe i'm the only comedian!. According to the Amarillo catalog that was inserted in many copies of my 7" record,other acts on the label include 'Anton LaVey','Zip Code Rapists',U.S. Saucer' and 'Faxed Head'.I haven't heard any of it,actually. I mostly listen to the radio,especially talk radio,which gives me insight into my audiences.I am currently working on a new single for a different label,Planet Pimp Records,also of San Francisco,& then hopefully i will get busy on a full-length release for Amarillo.**

RH: *Anything else you'd like to relay to your avid fans down under ?*

NEIL: **Why did the gambler go to the coroner's office ?.....He heard there was a lot of 'dice-action' going on there! ! Get it ? Dissection ? Funny stuff !....see you in 96' love, Neeeeeeeeeeeeeeeil Hamburger ! ! ! ! !**

And don't forget to join my fan club. $5 U.S. or $7 Oz gets you a years worth of the 'Neil Hamburger News Letter'. Write to me c/o:

88

AMARILLO RECORDS-P.O. BOX 24433 San Francisco CA 94124 USA

Any of those would work. It's not like there's any rules against people stretching the truth. Pringles has ads where they claim to be America's favorite potato chip, but if you eat two of these things you're going to have a stomachache and you're running to the toilette. There's ads for debt consolidators that aren't quite true. They claim that they'll get you out of debt, but how? By letting you borrow money from them? That's not going to work. If someone wants to get you out of debt, they'd say, "Here, Neil, here's $200,000, no strings attached, enjoy." Thank you. Now I'm out of debt. Not somebody who figures out some new payment plan or a potato chip that's absolutely horrible but claims to be America's favorite.

Have you thought of aligning yourself with any charities?
There are some foundations that I'm happy to collect money for. If you get a phone call from a woman and she says, "We're collecting for the Diabetes Fund," she gets paid from your donations and that's totally legal. Plus, there are all of those administration fees. I will collect for any charity there is with a very low administration fee of one percent and I will pass on the rest to the charity. If the American Cancer society calls up, believe you me, the administration fee's going to be a lot higher than one percent. So, in that sense I believe I'm America's Biggest Humanitarian. And that's a phrase we'll use as well.

That's excellent news. It seems like with this new marketing campaign that things will certainly be on the up and up for Neil Hamburger.
It certainly couldn't get any worse.

Are you sure? Certainly something could happen and make it worse.
I don't know. I think we've reached the peak. I don't think it could get any worse. Looking at my schedule for the next few weeks, I'm doing three shows a day and I have one day where I'm in three different states.

What if a large rock fell on you? That would certainly be worse.
I don't know. That might not be as bad. The large rock is painless and doing these shows is not. A small rock, now that I wouldn't be into. That just puts you in the hospital with a slow death. But a large one, that'll take you right out.

Well, I'm sure that America's Youngest and Most Gracious Comedian will attract the sort of crowd that's not only more interested but will also have some money in their pockets to give to you.
It has so far. We have a lot of people who really want to keep up with the newest and youngest thing. Folks who go to sequels for films without seeing the originals and they don't want to see the originals because they're too old.

Have you thought of a black tie affair performance?
You want to set that up for me?

Where would that happen? At some sort of affluent area like Martha's Vineyard?
Yeah, we could do a show there. Or Connecticut. I hear Hartford is quite fancy.

When we speak next, that's what we'll have in store for the readers.
Will you be coming to the show at the Knitting Factory?

Of course. I very much enjoyed your performance at Maxwell's of Hoboken last year.
That was tragedy.

Why do you say that?
We had all of two people there.

That sort of intimate performance was very enjoyable for myself and the other audience members.
Other audience member.

go to sequels for films without seeing the originals and they don't want to see the originals because they're too old.

Have you thought of a black tie affair performance?
You want to set that up for me?

Where would that happen? At some sort of affluent area like Martha's Vineyard?
Yeah, we could do a show there. Or Connecticut. I hear Hartford is quite fancy.

When we speak next, that's what we'll have in store for the readers.
Will you be coming to the show at the Knitting Factory?

Of course. I very much enjoyed your performance at Maxwell's of Hoboken last year.
That was tragedy.

Why do you say that?
We had all of two people there.

That sort of intimate performance was very enjoyable for myself and the other audience members.
Other audience member.

Was that the smallest crowd you've ever performed for?
We've done a few of the two person shows. We did one in Tasmania in the University of Tasmania. Two people came. We bounced back in another show in Tasmania where about 40 people showed up.

Do you ever cancel a show because due to poor attendance?
The show must go on. The show cannot be stopped by that. They paid their money and they want their show. In that case it was a free show, but they showed up and you have to honor that. I gave just as much to the two people as I gave to the 17,000 at Madison Square Garden.

I guess that makes you the world's youngest, most generous, and most honorable comedian.
Why yes it does. Thank you.

MySpace blog posts

Wednesday, May 30, 2007

Fox News, tonight, May 30

For those of you who are tired of staring at a blank wall:

Improbably, I will be back on the Fox News network tonight, appearing on the popular "Red Eye" TV program, which airs at 2 am Eastern/11 pm Pacific/etc.

This show airs on Fox News nationally and internationally (Australia and New Zealand take note!) but I can't convert the air-times for you, because my egg timer was stolen after a show last month in Blythe, California.

I will be on the hour-long show for about 5 minutes, discussing a variety of trivial topics, probably sometime around the half-way point.

Shut-ins, hotel dwellers, and cable TV addicts should all make sure that your schedule is clear so that you do not miss this television event, tonight!

Your $1 Friend,
Neil Hamburger

12:55 AM - **10 Comments** - **17 Kudos** - **Add Comment**

Monday, June 18, 2007

Haiku

A failed career
The laughter dried no one's tears
Fate has kept me poor

-Neil Hamburger

Currently reading :
Pumping Insulin: Everything You Need For Success On A Smart Insulin Pump
By John Walsh
Release date: 30 July, 2006

1:41 AM - **20 Comments** - **17 Kudos** - **Add Comment**

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

Help Wanted

Does anyone out there have any expertise putting back together a car that has fallen apart? I'm looking for someone to fix that, and also someone to repair moth-holes in a tuxedo. And finally, I need a technician skilled in repairing a leaking inflatable mattress (multiple leaks).

I can't pay money, but I can offer an on-stage "thank you" at my next show, and a wet trashbag full of various band demo CDs and cassettes.

Gratefully,
Neil Hamburger

2:52 PM - **21 Comments** - **10 Kudos** - **Add Comment**

Friday, June 15, 2007

Simply awful

Folks,

If you are finding this summer to be very, very painful, perhaps I can help.

I will be bringing my jokes to selected towns in the American South next week, on a gala tour that pairs me up with Australia's youngest magician, Dr. El Suavo.

Before catching the Greyhound bus to Nashville, I will be making appearance on that haven for freeloaders, the internet's one and only "Tom Green Live" program, this Monday night.

Here are the dates, which you can clip out of your computer screen using a glass cutter, and affix to your refrigerator:

Mon Jun 18 - www.tomgreen.com - "Tom Green Live"
Thu Jun 21 - NASHVILLE, TN - The End
Fri Jun 22 - COLUMBIA, SC - The Whig
Sat Jun 23 - ATLANTA, GA - Drunken Unicorn
Sun Jun 24 - MOBILE, AL - Cell Block
Mon Jun 25 - OXFORD, MS - The Jubilee
Tue Jun 26 - MEMPHIS, TN - Hi-Tone
Wed Jun 27 - ATHENS, GA - Tasty World
Sun Jul 8 - LOS ANGELES, CA - Spaceland

Finally, for those of you who have decided that leaving the house is unacceptable, we have prepared a program of my latest jokes as recorded on-stage opening for Tenacious D, and assembled them all together on the "live and in-person" collectors edition CD, HOT FEBRUARY NIGHT, which is not being sold in any stores. This CD is available to anyone with a heart, who wishes to spend $12.00, INCLUDING POSTAGE, to any address, anywhere in the WORLD.

In order to buy it, simply visit the Unofficial Neil Hamburger Website located at http://www.americasfunnyman.com, and click on the ugly white button that says "Buy Now", located somewhere on the left-hand side of the page.

We thank you for your patience in slogging through this dreary sales pitch disguised as an informational bulletin.

Your $1 Funnyman,
Neil Hamburger

Currently reading :
The 2007-2012 Outlook for Dry Cleaning and Laundry Services Excluding Coin-Operated Services in India
By Philip M. Parker
Release date: 14 October, 2006

5:37 PM - **9 Comments** - **12 Kudos** - **Add Comment**

MySpace blog posts

Thursday, December 20, 2007

Excluded from the holidays

The clerks at the truck stops have been unusually uninterested in saying "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays" to me this year. Meanwhile, Drag City informs me that no presents or cards have arrive for me at their offices. And it looks as though I will be spending Christmas day helping a friend by using buckets to remove 4 feet of flood water out of his basement before the health department comes in and shuts his place down. (He runs a pizza parlor I perform at frequently.) I hope it is better for all the rest of you. The holidays are a good chance to make a resolution for the coming year. Consider excluding sugary soft drinks from your diet before diabetes rains down on you.

Last week I recorded a new album in San Francisco. We hope to have it on the shelves by springtime. It is a most unusual recording and I do feel that the true fans will be satisfied. On the flipside, the freeloaders will continue to whine and nag and offer up nothing in return.

Your $1 Funnyman,
Neil Hamburger

Currently reading :
Thank You Power: Making the Science of Gratitude Work for You
By Deborah Norville
Release date: 02 October, 2007

1:30 AM - 23 Comments - 33 Kudos - Add Comment

Tuesday, February 05, 2008

Joke writing competition

Friends,

The 1st Annual Neil Hamburger Joke Writing Competition will take place this month in Dubai. (You need not be in Dubai to win.) SUBMIT YOUR ORIGINAL JOKES TO NEIL HAMBURGER for the chance to win an INVALUABLE PRIZE BASKET. First prize winner will receive a pre-release, SIGNED copy of Neil Hamburger's upcoming album "Neil Hamburger Sings Country Winners", as well as the honor and prestige of having Neil Hamburger himself perform YOUR JOKE at his upcoming show (February 17th) at the world-famous IMPROV in San Jose, California. Second prize winner will receive much less, and the third prize winner, well, they should be ashamed of themselves for not doing better.

Deadline is Wednesday, February 13. Submit your ORIGINAL jokes only! Jokes that are not used will be donated to CARROT TOP. This competition is sponsored by Vacation Timeshares of Louisiana, and is subject to all the rules and restrictions that similar competitions are hampered by.

Submit your jokes via Myspace messages to www.myspace.com/americasfunnyman

This could be your BIG CHANCE to be a behind the scenes, joke-writing SCAB!

******HOORAY FOR COMPETITION*******

Currently reading :
The Secret of Skull Mountain (Hardy Boys, Book 27)
By Franklin W. Dixon
Release date: 01 January, 1948

1:03 AM - 19 Comments - 26 Kudos - Add Comment

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

Free preview of new album

Hello again Friends,

On April 21st, Drag City records will release my new album, "Neil Hamburger Sings Country Winners".

In the tradition of Leonard Nimoy, William Shatner, and Telly Savalas, my management decided it was best for me to "roll the dice" and make an all-singing album. The style of music selected was country and western.

Fortunately, the band assembled to back me up felt strongly that the sound of current country and western music was unacceptable, and we went for more of a classic sound, such as you might have heard in Bakersfield, circa 1970. Some of the lyrics are not acceptable for listening by children under the age of 18 years of age (14 in Denmark; 19 in Arkansas).

Our all-star line-up features musical greats such as Dave Gleason, the "cosmic American music" guitarist; Atom Ellis, from The New Cars, Link Wray's band, and Dieselhed; the angelic voice of Rachel Haden, heard previously with the Rentals, That Dog, and The Sell-Outs; the West Coast's 1 pedal steel player Joe Goldmark; and one of music's all-time greats, drummer Prairie Prince, founding member of The Tubes, and a man whose resume includes stints with George Harrison, John Fogerty, Brian Eno, XTC, Jefferson Starship, and Todd Rundgren...

As time gets closer, we will provide you with ordering information, as this album will be released not only on CD and digital-download formats, but as a limited edition 12" LP record as well.

For those who aren't interested, and would prefer to hear only the Jokes, I have ten other albums out filled to the rafters with side-splitting gags. And there will be plenty of laughs in this music as well, not all of it related to my inability to sing in tune. There will also be many tears shed, at the pain, that is documented, in song.

For those who would like to give this temporary new direction a chance, or who are looking for another chance to freeload, follow the link below for a free sample.

http://www.dragcity.com/mp3/dc363nhaliwp.mp3

Your $1 Funnyman,
Neil Hamburger

Currently reading :
To Pay or Not to Pay: Insider Secrets to Beating Credit Card Debt and Creditors
By Stanley G. Hilton
Release date: December, 2003

11:23 AM - 11 Comments - 21 Kudos - Add Comment

Thursday, February 28, 2008

Joke-writing contest winners!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After sorting through LITERALLY THOUSANDS of submitted jokes, many of them quite poor, we have selected our winners, of the first annual Write A Joke For Neil Hamburger Contest.

Before I announce the winners, I would like to mention that this was a difficult decision. There were hundreds of terrible jokes, yes, but there were also dozens of quality jokes, that would put Jay Leno's writers to shame. In fact, there were several runner-ups whose jokes I feel, would be a great addition to my set, at least temporarily, and who I would like to extend a PRIZE to as well! Yes, that is correct, we will have MANY WINNERS in this rigged contest!

Using an old discarded Scientology E-METER found in a dumpster behind the Church of Scientology in Hollywood, we measured audience response to many of your jokes last Sunday at Los Angeles' Spaceland nightclub. Based on the documented great response to some (though not all) of these amateur jokewriting efforts, we feel that additional prizes should be awarded to more than just the top 3 entries. And thus, we are awarding 5 PRIZES (personally inscribed copies of the upcoming "Neil Hamburger Sings Country Winners" album) to the five amateur jokewriters.

Now for the winners. We will not give the punchlines away here in this bulletin...you'll have to attend one of my many shows and hope that you hear them there, in person! (Or, you'll have to harass the winners, who may or may not be willing to share their handiwork.)

GRAND PRIZE WINNERS:

Why was Martha Stewart so upset to be sentenced to 5 months in prison?
http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=241766700

Why did the blonde have trouble driving at night?
http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=67498686

Why did Britney Spears become so addicted to cocaine?
http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=114999700

What does disgraced rapper Tupac Shakur have in common with Blockbuster film 'Oceans 13'?
http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=46944537

Why did Heath Ledger call Mary Kate Olson as he lay dying?
http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=5093022

Thank you to all who tried, and failed. Failure is something that I am very familiar with. I hope you are not despondent over this. It is very possible that as inspiration wanes, I may refer back to some of the runners-up, and offer them a prize for the use of their joke at one or more of my many shows. So do not give up hope.

Your $1 Funnyman,
Neil Hamburger

Currently watching :
Return to the Blue Lagoon
Release date: 07 December, 1992

1:02 AM - 10 Comments - 12 Kudos - Add Comment

MySpace blog posts

Wednesday, May 28, 2008

Country Winners Shows this weekend

Dear Friends,

AS MANY OF YOU KNOW, I have recently attempted to salvage my career the old-fashioned way...by recording an album of song, despite my lack of qualifications to do so. But the album turned out much better than anyone had a right to expect, and thus, myself, and my Too-Good-For-Neil-Hamburger-Band (Dave Gleason, Atom Ellis, Prairie Prince), will be bringing our 90 minute Revue of jokes and music, to your town, this weekend. (If you happen to live in one of the following towns:)
Fri May 30 - MESA, AZ - Hollywood Alley
Sat May 31 - SAN DIEGO, CA - The Casbah
Sun June 1 - LOS ANGELES, CA - Spaceland

And then, I will head to Michigan for a very special one-off show, without the band, telling a litany of JOKES ONLY guaranteed to bring a smile to the face of at least 25% of attendees:
Thu June 5 - PONTIAC, MI - The Pike Room

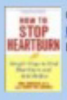
Returning to the West Coast (after a long ride stowed away inside the wheel well of a bus), I will reunite with the Country Winners Band to close out our Country Winners Revue Tour, with these glorious dates:
Tue June 10 - VISALIA, CA - The Cellar Door
Wed June 11 - SAN FRANCISCO, CA - Great American Music Hall
Fri June 13 - PORTLAND, OR - Doug Fir Lounge
Sat June 14 - SEATTLE, WA - Sunset Tavern

Finally, there will be one semi-Country Winners show at the tail end, as our drummer Prairie Prince has to depart for a more backstage candy-intensive gig with Todd Rundgren, forcing us to make do with a stripped-down sound, but with a smattering of EXTRA JOKES to make up for the lack of a drum beat:
Sun June 15 - BELLINGHAM, WA - Rogue Hero

If you can possibly attend one of these shows, please do, as we would love to make your acquaintance. If not, F.U.

Your Best Friend In The World,
Neil Hamburger

P.S. To order the new album "Neil Hamburger Sings Country Winners", follow this link: http://www.americasfunnyman.com/contact_1.html



Currently reading :
How to Stop Heartburn: Simple Ways to Heal Heartburn and Acid Reflux
By Anil Minocha

9:38 PM - **5 Comments** - **3 Kudos** - **Add Comment**

Friday, June 20, 2008

Neil Hamburger on Fox News tonight
Category: Movies, TV, Celebrities

Friends,

If you are a depressed insomniac shut-in, like most of my fans, your Friday night is about to get better! I will be appearing on late night news program "Red Eye with Greg Gutfeld" on the dreaded Fox News network tonight at 3 AM (Eastern time), which works out to Midnight (Pacific Time). The show airs internationally as well, so wherever you are, whoever you are, you will have a chance to see this show, provided you know how to convert between time zones.

It is an hour-long program and I do not yet know at what point I will appear, though if memory serves, on previous appearances they brought me out a little after the half-way point. But anything is possible, so stock up on plenty of rum, caramel, and insulin...it will be a night to remember!

Your TV Friend,
Neil Hamburger

Currently reading :
Communism, hypnotism and the Beatles;: An analysis of the Communist use of music, the Communist master music plan,
By David A Noebel

4:57 PM - **11 Comments** - **21 Kudos** - **Add Comment**

Newsletters

NEIL HAMBURGER NEWSLETTER

••• SPECIAL EDITION! • SUMMER, 1996 •••

THE INSIDE SCOOP ON "AMERICA'S FUNNYMAN"

You are probably wondering what is the inside scoop about Neil's new album. Well, you probably don't know that it was recorded mostly at shows in Albuquerque, Modesto (a Hamburger favorite!), and Las Vegas!!! You probably also don't know that it is Neil's first full-length record although he has recorded some singles. You probably don't know that Neil's manager Art Huckman insisted on "censoring" parts of Neil's famous "Top Ten List" routine to make the record acceptable for fans of all ages, and at the same time making the record a "collector's item". You probably don't know that Neil was going through a difficult divorce while making the record, but managed to "crack the crowd up" even as his own "personal life" and strength was showing signs of "cracking up" itself! Well, guess what? YOU KNOW IT ALL KNOW!

NEIL'S NEW ALBUM IS RATED "P.G." SAYS MANAGER HUCKMAN

Neil Hamburger's manager Art Huckman took time off from his busy schedule to comment that Neil's new album, "America's Funnyman" is "Rated P.G.--PRETTY GOOD!" Thanks Art, and Thanks, Neil!!!!!

NEIL HAMBURGER SEES CURRENT MOVIE

During a rare afternoon off from performer or travellling, Neil caught up on his movie watching. And what did Neil say about the popular, current movies he saw? You'll have to attend one of his many shows to Find Out!

SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE

Neil has been noticing more and more as he tours that a lot of the clubs are not well-equipped to have a show. Things like not a good backstage area, or microphones that are shorting out. Maybe the clubs will think about getting it together for the next time NEEEEEILLLLLLLL HAMMMMMBUUURRRGGGGERRRRR comes to town!!!.

NEIL DONATES TO CHARITY

Despite his popularity and hard work, Neil still finds the time to donate to charity. Too busy to make a major donation, Neil depends on the little plastic containers found on counter-tops at (you guessed it) 7-11 to satisify his charitable concerns.

HAPPY TO SIGN AUTOGRAPHS

Neil loves to sign autographs, so if you see him at a show, be sure and buy his record and then ask him to sign it, to make it all the more precious and memorable.

NEIL HAMBURGER WOWS THE CROWD IN PUEBLO, COLORADO

Neil Hamburger's recent show in Pueblo, Colorado was worth the wait, say diehard fans. It seems that they don't get enough humor in Pueblo, as the house was absolutely brought down as Neil reprised his great jokes to an entusistic crowd. Congratulations, Pueblo, for having the time of your lives!!!

HOMELESS COMEDIAN IMPRESSES AUDIENCES

A homeless comedian has been knocking audiences out of their seats, howling with laughter, sources say. Who is this homeless comedian who is causing such a fuss? Why it's none other than NEIL HAMBURGER! Wait a minute, Neil doesn't look like a bum, and while he is known sometimes to ask for spare change, it is only to suppliment his performance fee. So what's going on? Simple--Neil has spent so much time on the road recently, he just hasn't had the time to rent a new house or apartment after the painful divorce that had him removing his belongings from his former home in Culver City, Calif. So until his schedule slows down, Neil will continue to make his "home" the motels and hotels of America, as well as the hearts of those he has entertained.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY TO NEWSLETTER, SAYS NEIL HAMBURGER.

This special edition is great, but Neil suggests you subscribe to get the regular editions, because they have all the tour dates and news. So what are you watiing for? You even get your own membership card (signed by Neil) and button. For information, write to the Neil Hamburger Fan Club, c/o P.O. Box 15927, Santa Fe, NM 87506. Allow 6-10 weeks for your information to arrive.

NEIL HAMBURGER NEWSLETTER VOLUME 1, NUMBER 6 * MARCH, 1998

LOTS HAS HAPPENED SINCE LAST NEWSLETTER, SAYS HUCKMAN

A lot of things have happened in the life of Neil Hamburger since the last issue of the Newsletter was published, according to Neil's manager Art Huckman. "It's time for a new issue of the newsletter because so much has happened since the last one was published" Art Huckman, Neil's long-time manager, was reported to have said recently. We will do our best to bring you up to date on some of the things Art is talking about.

NEIL HAMBURGER RELEASES NEW ALBUM!

Early this year Neil's new album, "RAW Hamburger" was released by the Drag City label. According to Art Huckman, Neil's manager, the new LP is "very, very funny" and Art also predicts "we should sell a million of these things". The album was released in both the LP (album) and the CD (compact disc) formats to give Neil's fans a choice.

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDS RELEASE OF NEW ALBUM BY NEIL HAMBURGER

Drag City Records, the Chicago-based record label who also released Neil's album "America's Funnyman", also an all-time classic. According to a spokesperson, Neil's new album constains some "Adult" oriented humor and so a controversial "Warning label" was applied to the front cover. This will insure that the record doesn't fall into the hands of the "little ones," Neil's many young fans that shouldn't listent to this record. Hold on kids--Neil may record a special record just for you some day (if there is any hope of anyone releasing such a record.)

NEIL HAMBURGER STANDS UP FOR THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Amid the controversy surrounding his new "adult" album, (RAW HAMBURGER) Neil has been spotted doing the most uncontroversial of activities: standing up to salute our flag during the performance of the "National Anthem" at a recent baseball game. According to Neil, this kind of display comes "second nature" and was not an attempt to dissuade the controversy and critics who claim he has become a spokesman for the "filth" generation.

HUCKMAN'S NEW COOKING COLUMN A SUCCESS!

Manager Art Huckman debuted his cooking column a past issue of this newsletter, to spice it up. Well, here's another great recipe straight from "master chef Huckman's" personal kitchen:

ORANGE VODKA and SUGAR CANDY
4 ozs. vodka (store brand OK)
1/2 oz lemon juice
3 teaspoon sugar
4 oz Sunkist Orange soda (store brand OK)
Mars bar

Shake ingredience with ice. (Excpet Mars bar which should be set aside.) Strain into glass, or just pour and drink quickly. Serve with Mars bar or other candy bar. This drink packs a real bang so you might want to eat something first besides just the Mars bar.

NEIL HAMBURGER NEWSLETTER TO PUBLISH MORE FREQUENTLY

We're hoping that the News Letter will publish more frequently. Due to the internet and things it's possible.

NEIL HAMBUREGER RECEIVES SONY PLAYSTAION FROM SONY

Neil Hamburger recently received a brand new Sony Playstation complements of Sony. The occasion was he was supposed to review the Playstation and the game they sent too, for a magazine called "Popsmear"...Neil loves free things and loved the whole experience. Watch your newstand to see what Neil Hamburger had to say about his time spent playing on the popular Sony Playstation, which he was alloed to keep.

PLEASE BUY NEIL'S LOVING TRIBUTE TO PRINCESS DI SOON

On March 14, Neil performed his new Tribute to Diana Princess of Wales routine on stage in Melbourne, Australia. The routine was recorded by a local radio station there and was boradcast over the airwaves, but was also taped, and Neil is going to use that tape for a new 45 rpm single he is making for Planet Pimp Records. This will be Neil's way of saying goodbye to the late Princess Diana who died. Neil also did a 10-minute interview for the radio station, 3RRR-FM, and they played selections from his many records. Thanks to eveyrone who was involved in this special evening.

NEIL HAMBURGER TOUR DIARY APPEARS IN BANANAFISH MAGAZINE

Recently a magazine called "Bananafish" magazine printed a Neil Hamburger tour diary. Neil kept this diary during a tour last year and the magazine printed it. There is also a CD included with this magazine, and it has a rare contribution from America's Funnyman himself, Neeeeilllllllll Hammmmmbbbbbbuuuuurrrrggger!!!!!

TOUR DATES UNAVAILABLE SAYS MANAGER HUCKMAN

According to Neil's manager, Art Huckman, he was unable to get the tour dates to us in time for the dead line, but you should check you r local papers. Neil's touring everywhere lately and that's just great for the lucky fans.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Newsletter,
Why can't I find the News Letter on my local News Stand?
Sincerely, Can't Find It

Dear Can't Find It,
They don't sell it.

Dear Editor,
I just wanted to say I love the Neil Hamburger news letter, and I love the recordings and performances of Neil Hamburger too. -Conny

Dear Conny,
It's great to get letter like this, which are authentic.

Dear Editor,
I was wondering something. How come Neil never plays in my town? I'm fed up with reading about his shows but then he never comes here. -Tony

Dear Tony,
We checked his schedule and Neil will be playing in your town later on this year. So be sure and go see the show, and stop complaing.

NEIL HAMBURGER NEWSLETTER, PUBLISHED 12 TIMES A YEAR. ONE YEAR SUSCRIPTION IS $5.00, AND INCLUDES MEMBERSHIP TO THE NIEL HAMBURGER FAN CLUB and a button. WRITE TO:

NEIL HAMBURGER FAN CLUB,
P.O. BOX 15927 SANTA FE, N.M. 87506
allow 6-10 weeks delivery.

NEIL HAMBURGER NEWSLETTER TO BE IN GOOD HANDS SOON

Neil Hamburger fans can rest assured that the Newsetter will be in good hands, soon, following the departure of Neil's longtime manager and newsletter editor, Art Huckman. Long time fan of Neil's, Boni Jergen, has agreed to take care of getting the newsletter out to people who love it and WHO LOVE NEIL until things settle down. This includes some possible changes to the look of the newletter and also keeping every one up to date.

NEIL HAMBURGER ADMITS HE'S ALWAYS HAD A HAND IN THE NEWSLETTER, LOVES HIS FANS

In the wake of the sudden departure of Neil's longtime manager, Art Huckman, Neil Hamburger has taken a page out of the President's Book, and made an admission himself: "I've always had a hand it putting together the newsletter." says Neil. "I love my fans and it's great to keep in touch with them this way." Neil reportedly said.

ART HUCKMAN TAKES LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Neil Hamburger's longtime manager, Art Huckman, a resident of Nevada, has taken a leave of absence from tending to Neil's career. This, following their tour in Malaysia in July. According to sources, Neil says "I hope Art will come back. It's a great team." The dispute is reputed to be an agreeable one but still, fans and Neil both wish Art would come back.

HUCKMAN'S NEW COOKING COLUMN SUSPENDED FOR NOW

A popular feature of the newsletter, Art Huckman's "Cooking Column" has been suspended for the time being, since Art is currently doing other things than tending to the career of AMERICA'S FUNNYMAN, Neeeeilllllll Hammmmmmbburuuger!

NEIL HAMBURGER BOOKINGS SCARCE IN WAKE OF MANAGER HUCKMAN'S DEPARTURE

It's true that Neil didn't have a lot of bookings in October but Neil doesn't blame Art Huckman's departure for that. "October is a slow time, traditionally. People are too busy in October to go out and see comedians. Things will pick up soon." Neil said. He advises fans in areas where he won't be playing to look on the bright side and also to "listen to my records instead."

NEIL'S NEW PRINCESS DIANA RECORD IS A GREAT TRIBUTE TO THE SLAIN PRINCESS

Following in the footsteps of Elton John and the Franklin Mint, Neil Hamburger has issued a commemorative release in memory of Princess "Di" Diana and he's hoping to sell a million. (The Princess' favorite charities benefit and so does the listener.) This new 7" single record includes Neil's loving tribute to the Princess and it is done in Neil's inimitable funnyman style. And the cover is a beatufil picture of Princess Di and it's suitable for framing too. This record comes with a souvenir handkercheif for those who are moved to emotion at the loss of the People's Princess. This is truly a collector's item to buy, because Neil has vowed to drop these special jokes from his routine following the release of the record.

DEATH OF BELOVED PRINCESS DOESN'T SLOW DOWN NEIL HAMBURGER!

Sources say, Neil performed the very next night after the tragedy--but dedicated the first half of his show to the late princess. Neil also dedicated portions of his set to others who have passed avay recently, including his parents, and Notoris BIG, a famous who died too.

NEW ALBUM COMING SOON SAYS NEIL'S PRODUCER AND RECORD COMPANY

Good news for fans, a new Neil Hamburger album is slated for release in mid-January 1999. This one was recorded live on Neil's recent tour in Malaysia in July, and is reported to be the longest and best Neil Hamburger album yet! According to the people at the Drag City record company, the record will be called "LEFT FOR DEAD IN MALAYSIA," and the record includes Neil's Spice Girls routine that has been slaying audiences everywhere. The album is expected to sell great.

NEIL HAMBURGER MUGS ARE GREAT AND ARE FINALLY AVAILABLE!

The Neil Hamburger mugs are now available! These ceramic mugs feature the "mug" of America's favorite Funnyman, Neil Hamburger. And the best thing about them is that if you bring them to any of Neil's live performances you will automatically receive a refill for only 49 cents. BUY THEM FOR CHRISTMAS PRESENTS! Their $10.00 each and that includes the postage in the United Staes. Order from: Amarillo, 5714 Folsom Blvd. Suite 300 Sacramento CA 95819.

NEIL HAMBURGER HOPES MUGS, NEW ALBUM WILL SELL WELL

Christmas is coming and it's a time to make your Christmas wishes for the new Year. What does FUNNYMAN NEIL HAMBURGER wish for this year? According to Neil, he hopes his new album and his new mugs will sell well. This will enable him to take his career to the "next step," Neil reportedly said. As for Neil's fans, if you don't know what to wish for maybe you should make a wish that NEEEEIIIILLLLLLL HAAAMBUURRRRRGGEERRRRR will come and play in your town soon. Merry Chirstmas from Neil Hamburger and the Neil Hamburger News letter.

LETTERS TO THE NEWSLETTER

Dear Newsletter,
I was wondering if it's possible to meet Neil Hamburger.

--Wondering

Dear Wondering,
Yes it is!!!!!

NEIL HAMBURGER NEWSLETTER, PUBLISHED 12 TIMES A YEAR. ONE YEAR SUSCRIPTION IS $5.00, AND INCLUDES MEMBERSHIP TO THE NIEL HAMBURGER FAN CLUB and a button. WRITE TO:

NEIL HAMBURGER FAN CLUB,
c/o Amarillo Records
5714 Folsom Blvd, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA 95819
allow 6-10 weeks delivery.